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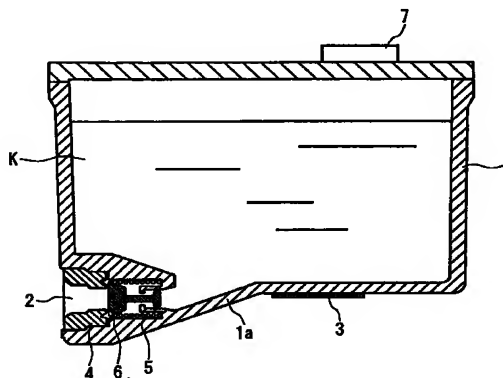
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(54) **A liquid container having a liquid consumption detecting device therein**

(57) An ink cartridge serving as a liquid container, comprises a liquid sensor having a piezoelectric element which detects a consumption state of the liquid contained in the container, and a consumption data memory as a memory means. The consumption data memory is a rewritable memory which stores consumption related data which are related to the detection of the consumption state using the liquid sensor. The consumption related data are, for example, consumption state data as a result of the detection. Even when the ink cartridge is removed, the consumption state data can still be utilized. The consumption related data may be a detection characteristic detected depending on the consumption state of the liquid. Based on this detection characteristic, the consumption state is detected utilizing the liquid sensor. The consumption state can be detected irrespective of individual differences of the ink cartridges.



**FIG. 1**

## Description

**[0001]** This patent application claims priority based on a Japanese patent applications, H. 11-139683 filed on May 20, 1999, H. 11-147538 filed on May 27, 1999 and H. 11-256522 filed on September 10, 1999, the contents of which are incorporated herein by reference.

## BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

### 1. Field of the Invention

**[0002]** The present invention relates to a liquid container and a liquid consumption. More particularly, the present invention relates to an ink cartridge to which a piezoelectric device detecting an ink consumption state inside an ink cartridge supplying the liquid to a printing head is mounted and to which a memory means that stores ink consumption data detected by the piezoelectric device is mounted.

### 2. Description of the Related Art

**[0003]** In an ink-jet recording apparatus, a carriage thereof is comprised of a pressure generating means which pressurizes a pressure generating chamber and a nozzle opening which discharges the pressurized ink therefrom as ink droplets. The ink-jet recording apparatus is structured such that ink from the ink tank is being supplied to a recording head via a passage, so as to continuously perform a printing operation. The ink tank is structured as a cartridge in a detachable manner so that a user can replace it when ink is consumed out.

**[0004]** Conventionally, as a method of controlling the ink consumption of the ink cartridge, a method is known of controlling the ink consumption by means of a calculation in which the counted number of ink droplets discharged by the recording head and the amount of ink sucked in a maintenance process of the printing head are integrated by software, and another method of controlling the ink consumption in which the time at which the ink is actually consumed is detected by directly mounting to the ink cartridge the electrodes for use in detecting the liquid surface, and so forth.

**[0005]** Moreover, in the calculation-based method of controlling the ink consumption by integrating the discharged number of ink droplets and the amount of ink or the like by the software, there is a problem where the ink consumption amount inside the ink cartridge can not be detected. As for the method of controlling by electrodes the time at which the ink is consumed, there remain problems such as limitation to the types of ink and the complicated sealing structure of the electrodes and so on though a structure for detecting the ink consumption may be somehow proposed.

**[0006]** However, in the calculation-based method of controlling the ink consumption by integrating the discharged number of ink droplets and the amount of ink or the like by the software, there are problems where an error occurs due to a printing mode and so on at a user's side and another unwanted error occurs when the same cartridge is mounted again. Moreover, the pressure inside the ink cartridge and the viscosity of the ink change depending on usage environment such as ambient temperature and humidity, elapsed time after an ink cartridge has been opened for use, and usage frequency at a user side. Thus, a problem is caused where a considerable error occurs between the calculated ink consumption and the actual ink consumption.

**[0007]** On the other hand, in the method of controlling by electrodes the time at which the ink is consumed, as disclosed for example in the Japanese Patent Application Laid-Open No. Hei8-34123, whether or not the ink is present can be controlled with high reliability since the liquid surface of ink can be actually detected. actual ink consumption can be detected at one point. However, since detecting the liquid surface of ink relies on the ink conductivity, there are problems in that types of ink which can be detected might be limited and a sealing structure of the electrodes becomes complicated. Moreover, since precious metal is usually used as the electrode material, which is highly conductive and erosive, manufacturing costs of the ink cartridge increases thereby. Moreover, since it is necessary to attach the two electrodes to two separate positions of the ink cartridge, the manufacturing process increases, thus causing a problem which increases the manufacturing costs.

**[0008]** Moreover, when the ink cartridge scans together with the recording head of the ink-jet recording apparatus, there are occasions where undulated waves are caused and bubbles generated. The bubbles may cause erroneous operation in the course of detecting whether or not the ink is present. In particular, in apparatus which directly detects the ink consumption amount using the electrodes to control the point at which the ink is consumed, the erroneous operation due to bubbles are significant.

**[0009]** There is an occasion where a cavity is provided in an ink detecting portion inside the cartridge, in apparatus which directly detects the ink consumption amount using the electrodes to control the point at which the ink is consumed. That there exists ink in the cavity may cause erroneous detection.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

**[0010]** Therefore, the present invention has been made in view of the foregoing drawbacks and it is an object of the present invention to provide a liquid container capable of reliably detecting a liquid consumption status and dispensing with a complicated sealing structure. It is another object of the present invention to provide an ink cartridge capable of reliably detecting the ink consumption amount and capable of dispensing with a complicated sealing structure. These objects are achieved by combinations described in the independent claims. The dependent claims define further advantageous and exemplary combinations of the present invention.

**[0011]** The present invention provides a technology of detecting the liquid remaining amount by utilizing vibration in particular, and such a technology is improved. The present invention makes possible suitable utilization of detection result, and improves detection accuracy. Moreover, the present invention is not limited to the ink cartridge and can be applied to detecting the other liquid contained in the liquid container.

**[0012]** The above object can be achieved by providing a liquid container mounted to a liquid utilizing apparatus, which comprises a liquid sensor having a piezoelectric element and a memory means which stores data related to liquid consumption status detected by the liquid sensor. In particular, the above object can be achieved by providing an ink cartridge mounted to an ink-jet recording apparatus, which comprises a liquid sensor having a piezoelectric element and a memory means which stores data related to liquid consumption status detected by the liquid sensor.

**[0013]** According to the present invention, the liquid utilizing apparatus is typically an ink-jet recording apparatus while the liquid container is typically an ink cartridge. The liquid container according to the present invention comprises a liquid sensor having a piezoelectric element and a memory means. Preferably, a detection signal is generated which indicates vibration of the piezoelectric element corresponding to the liquid consumption state inside the container. The memory means stores data related to the liquid container. The memory means is preferably a consumption data memory, and the consumption data memory is rewritable, and stores the consumption related data which relate to detecting the consumption state using the liquid sensor. By utilizing the piezoelectric element, the consumption state can be appropriately detected without leakage. By providing the memory means which is associated with the piezoelectric element, each liquid container can have the consumption related data necessary for the liquid container.

**[0014]** The consumption related data may be consumption state data obtained by using the liquid sensor. For example, suppose that the liquid container is removed from the liquid utilizing apparatus with the liquid having been half-way consumed. When the liquid container is mounted again or mounted to another apparatus, the consumption state is read out of the memory means so as to be used. The detection result can be prevented from being lost accompanied by removal of the container. A user is informed of the consumption state, and a control based on the consumption state is possible. In this manner, according to the present invention, suitable utilization of the detection result is possible. In addition to the consumption state detected by the liquid sensor, the memory means may store the consumption state estimated from the printing amount.

**[0015]** The consumption related data may be detection characteristic data utilized in the course of obtaining the consumption status using the liquid sensor, and are preferably data detected corresponding to the consumption state. The consumption state is detected based on the detection characteristic data using the liquid sensor. The detection characteristic data may be data indicating acoustic impedance and are preferably data on a resonant frequency. For example, suppose that a control computer of the ink-jet recording apparatus has a detection processing capability. This control computer may obtain the detection characteristic data from the cartridge at the time when the ink cartridge is mounted.

**[0016]** The present invention is advantageous if there are differences among the liquid containers having unique detection characteristics. Due to irregularity in the shape of the container and other various factors, the detection characteristic of the sensor provided in the liquid container differs per a container. Thus, preferably, the detection characteristic intrinsic to each container is measured and stored in the memory means. Utilizing this detection characteristic, the effect caused by the irregularity among containers can be reduced so as to improve the detection accuracy.

**[0017]** The detection characteristic data may be detection characteristic data prior to the consumption which indicate the detection characteristic (acoustic impedance and so on) before the liquid inside the liquid container is consumed. Moreover, the detection characteristic data may be the detection characteristic data after the consumption which indicate the detection characteristic expected when the liquid has been consumed up to a predetermined detection target. Of course, both the detection characteristic data prior to the consumption and the detection characteristic data after the consumption may be stored.

**[0018]** The memory means (consumption data memory) may store the measured values in the detection characteristic data after the liquid container is mounted to apparatus utilizing the liquid of the liquid container. For example, immediately after the ink cartridge is mounted to the ink-jet recording apparatus, the acoustic impedance is detected by using the liquid sensor. That measured value is stored in the consumption data memory, and is utilized as the detection characteristic data after the start of ink usage. The detection characteristic which is prepared in advance may be corrected by the measured value. By these adjustments at initial stages, the irregularity due to the individual differences of

the containers can be suitably alleviated so as to improve the detection accuracy

**[0019]** The memory means (consumption data memory) may store the measured value in the detection characteristic data, in a manufacturing process of the liquid container. Since the measured value is obtained in the manufacturing process, a measured value of the detection characteristic prior to the liquid injection can also be obtained. Both or either of the detection characteristic data prior to the consumption and the detection characteristic data after the consumption may be easily stored.

**[0020]** The memory means may store the data prior to the consumption. The memory means may store data on change in consumed amount.

**[0021]** The memory means may store data on the ink. The memory means may store data on the type of ink. The data on the type of ink may be data obtained by the liquid sensor.

**[0022]** The liquid sensor and the memory means may be arranged in different positions on the liquid container. The liquid sensor and the memory means may be arranged in different positions on the same wall surface of the liquid container. The liquid sensor and the memory means may be arranged on different wall surfaces of the liquid container. The wall surface on which the liquid sensor is arranged may be perpendicular to the wall surface on which the memory means (consumption data memory) is arranged.

**[0023]** The liquid sensor and the memory means may be provided in the center in the cross direction of the container. The liquid sensor and the memory means may be provided in the vicinity of a supply port which supplies the liquid from the liquid container, and be provided in the center in the cross direction of the container. An advantageous aspect is obtained where a position displacement of the liquid sensor and the memory against the container being aslope at the time of mounting can be reduced. Moreover, utilizing the positioning structure of the supply port, the position displacement of the liquid sensor and the memory can be reduced.

**[0024]** The liquid sensor and the memory means may be provided on the same base plate (consumption detection base plate). The liquid sensor and the memory means are easily mounted. The base plate is in the vicinity of the supply port which supplies the liquid from the liquid container, and may be arranged in the center in the cross direction of the container, so that the position displacement can be reduced as described above.

**[0025]** Moreover, a mounting module in which the liquid sensor and the mounting structure are integrally formed may be attached to the base plate. The liquid sensor can be protected from externally. Moreover, mounting can be performed with ease so as to result in cost reduction.

**[0026]** There may be provided a positioning structure which positioning-performs on the base plate to the liquid container. The mounting position accuracy can be improved.

**[0027]** Preferably, the consumption state is detected based on the change in the acoustic impedance accompanied by the liquid consumption. The liquid sensor may output a signal which indicates a residual vibrating state after the vibration is generated. The liquid consumption is detected based on the fact that the residual vibrating state changes corresponding to the liquid consumption state.

**[0028]** Moreover, the liquid sensor may generate an elastic wave toward the interior of the liquid container, and may generate a detection signal corresponding to a reflected wave of the elastic wave.

**[0029]** The memory means may be a semiconductor memory such as an EEPROM.

**[0030]** Another mode of the present invention is a liquid detecting device. The liquid detecting device comprises a liquid sensor and a memory means. The liquid sensor includes a piezoelectric element. A detection signal is generated which indicates vibration of the piezoelectric element corresponding to the liquid consumption state inside the liquid container. The memory means is rewritable and stores the consumption related data which relate to detecting the consumption state using the liquid sensor.

**[0031]** In this embodiment, both or either of the liquid sensor and the memory need not be provided in the liquid sensor. A detection processing mechanism using the liquid sensor may be provided in the liquid utilizing apparatus on in an external apparatus connected thereto, or arranged in the liquid container or provided at a plurality of locations.

**[0032]** For example, suppose that the liquid sensor is provided in the liquid container, and the memory and the detection processing mechanism are mounted in the liquid utilizing apparatus. The detection processing mechanism identifies the liquid container and reads out the consumption related data corresponding to that liquid from the memory means so as to be used.

**[0033]** In still another embodiment according to the present invention, there is provided a liquid consumption detecting base plate which is used for detecting the consumption state of the liquid inside the liquid container, which includes a sensor and a memory means.

**[0034]** This summary of the invention does not necessarily describe all necessary features of the present invention. The present invention may also be a sub-combination of the above described features. The above and other features and advantages of the present invention will become more apparent from the following description of embodiments taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0035]

- 5 Fig. 1 shows an embodiment of an ink cartridge for use with a single color, for example, the black ink.  
 Fig. 2 shows an embodiment of the ink cartridge which houses a plural types of inks.  
 Fig. 3. shows an ink-jet recording apparatus suitable for the ink cartridges shown in Fig. 1 and Fig. 2, according to an embodiment of the present invention.  
 Fig. 4 is a detailed cross sectional view of a sub-tank unit 33.
- 10 Fig. 5(I) - 5(V) show manufacturing methods of elastic wave generating means 3, 15, 16 and 17.  
 Fig. 6 shows another embodiment of the elastic wave generating means 3 shown in Fig. 5.  
 Fig. 7 shows an ink cartridge according to another embodiment of the present invention.  
 Fig. 8 shows an ink cartridge according to still another embodiment of the present invention.  
 Fig. 9 shows an ink cartridge according to still another embodiment of the present invention.
- 15 Fig. 10 shows an ink cartridge according to still another embodiment of the present invention.  
 Fig. 11 shows an ink cartridge according to still another embodiment of the present invention.  
 Fig. 12A and Fig. 12B shows another embodiments of the ink cartridge shown in Fig. 11.  
 Fig. 13A and Fig. 13B show ink cartridges according to still another embodiment of the present invention.  
 Figs. 14A, 14B and 14C show plan views of the through hole 1c according to another embodiment.
- 20 Figs. 15A and 15B show cross sections of the ink-jet recording apparatus according to still another embodiment of the present invention.  
 Figs. 16A and 16B show an embodiment of the ink cartridge suitable for the recording apparatus shown in Figs. 15A and 15B.  
 Fig. 17 shows an ink cartridge 272 according to still another embodiment of the present invention.
- 25 Fig. 18 shows an ink cartridge 272 and an ink-jet recording apparatus according to still another embodiment of the present invention.  
 Fig. 19 shows still another embodiment of the ink cartridge 272 shown in Fig. 16.  
 Figs. 20A, 20B and 20C show details of the actuator 106.  
 Figs. 21A, 21B, 21C, 21D, 21E and 21F show periphery and equivalent circuits of the actuator 106.
- 30 Figs. 22A and 22B show relationship between the ink density and ink resonant frequency detected by the actuator 106.  
 Figs. 23A and 23B show waveforms of the counter electromotive force of the actuator 106.  
 Fig. 24 shows another embodiment of the actuator 106.  
 Fig. 25 shows a cross section of a part of the actuator 106 shown in Fig. 24.
- 35 Fig. 26 shows a cross section of the entire actuator 106 shown in Fig. 24.  
 Fig. 27 shows a manufacturing method of the actuator 106 shown in Fig. 24.  
 Figs. 28A, 28B and 28C show an ink cartridge according to still another embodiment of the present invention.  
 Figs. 29A, 29B and 29C show another embodiment of the through hole 1c.  
 Fig. 30 shows an actuator 660 according to another embodiment.
- 40 Figs. 31A and 31B show an actuator 670 according to still another embodiment.  
 Fig. 32 is a perspective view showing a module 100.  
 Fig. 33 is an exploded view showing the structure of the module 100 shown in Fig. 32.  
 Fig. 34 shows another embodiment of the module 100.  
 Fig. 35 is an exploded view showing the structure of the module 100 shown in Fig. 34.
- 45 Fig. 36 shows still another embodiment of the module 100.  
 Fig. 37 shows an exemplary cross section of the module 100 shown in fig. 32 where the module 100 is mounted to the ink container.  
 Figs. 38A, 38B and 38C show still another embodiment of the module 100.  
 Fig. 39 shows an embodiment of the an ink cartridge using the actuator 106 shown in Fig. 20 and Fig. 21 and an ink-jet recording apparatus therefor.
- 50 Fig. 40 shows a detail of the ink-jet recoding apparatus.  
 Figs. 41A and 41B show another embodiments of the ink cartridge 180 shown in Fig. 40.  
 Figs. 42A, 42B and 42C show still another embodiment of the ink cartridge 180.  
 Figs. 43A, 43B and 43C show still another embodiment of the ink cartridge 180.
- 55 Figs. 44A, 44B, 44C and 44D show still another embodiment of the ink cartridge 180.  
 Figs. 45A, 45B and 45C show another embodiments of the ink cartridge 180 shown in Fig. 44C.  
 Figs. 46A, 46B, 46C and 46D show still another embodiment of the ink cartridge using the module 100.  
 Fig. 47 is a block diagram showing structure of the ink cartridge to which the liquid sensor and the consumption

data memory are provided

Fig. 48 shows a processing of the consumption detecting process unit 812 utilizing the consumption data memory 804.

Fig. 49 shows a recording timing of the detection characteristic to the consumption data memory.

Fig. 50 is an exemplary configuration showing an arrangement of the liquid sensor and the consumption data memory in the ink cartridge.

Figs. 51A and 51B show an exemplary positioning of the supply port.

Fig. 52 is an exemplary configuration showing an arrangement of the supply port in the ink cartridge.

Fig. 53 is a functional block diagram for an ink-jet recording apparatus equipped with the ink consumption detecting device according to the present embodiment.

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

**[0036]** The invention will now be described based on the preferred embodiments, which do not intend to limit the scope of the present invention, but exemplify the invention. All of the features and the combinations thereof described in the embodiment are not necessarily essential to the invention.

**[0037]** First of all, the principle of the present embodiment will be described. In the present embodiment, the present invention is applied to a technology by which to detect ink consumption state inside an ink container. The ink consumption state is detected by utilizing a liquid sensor including a piezoelectric element. The liquid sensor generates a detection signal which indicates vibration of the piezoelectric element corresponding to the ink consumption state.

**[0038]** As a feature of the present embodiment, in addition to the liquid sensor, a consumption data memory is provided in an ink cartridge. The consumption data memory is one which embodies the memory means for use with the liquid container in the present invention. The consumption data memory is rewritable and stores the consumption related data which relate to consumption state using the liquid sensor. By providing the consumption data memory, each liquid container can have the consumption related data necessary for each liquid container.

**[0039]** For example, the consumption related data are consumption state data obtained by using the liquid sensor. Suppose that an ink cartridge is removed from the ink-jet recording apparatus, and is mounted again. Since the consumption state data are held in the memory, loss of the consumption state data can be prevented. At the time of mounting, the consumption state data can be utilized by reading them out of the memory.

**[0040]** Moreover, the consumption related data may be data on detection characteristics detected corresponding to the consumption of the liquid. The detection related data are, for example, data indicating an acoustic impedance corresponding to the ink consumption state. This detection characteristic data are read out and utilized in detecting the consumption state. According to this embodiment, the ink-jet device need not have the detection characteristic data. A possible change in detection characteristics due to a design change of the cartridge may be coped with suitably.

**[0041]** The present embodiment is advantageous in case the ink cartridges have individual differences among them. The detection characteristic differs slightly among cartridges due to a manufacturing irregularity and so on. By storing the detection characteristics of individual cartridges in the consumption data memory, the effect caused by the individual difference can be reduced so as to improve the detection accuracy.

**[0042]** Moreover, the consumption data memory, as a memory means in the present invention, stores the ink related data therein. The memory means also stores data on a type of ink and so on. Moreover, this memory means stores other data such as a manufacturing data, cleaning sequence data, image processing data and so on.

**[0043]** Hereinbelow, the present embodiments will be further described in detail with reference of drawings. First, fundamental of the technology which detects the ink consumption based on vibration utilizing a piezoelectric device will be described, which is followed by various applications of the detection technology. In the present embodiment, the ink cartridge includes a liquid sensor and a consumption data memory. Thereafter, what is related to the consumption data memory will be described in detail.

**[0044]** In the present embodiment, the liquid sensor is constituted specifically by a piezoelectric device. In the following description, an actuator and an elastic wave generating means correspond to the liquid sensor. The consumption data memory is a semiconductor memory (semiconductor memory means). Cartridge which detects the ink consumption

**[0045]** Fig. 1 is a cross sectional view of an embodiment of an ink cartridge for use with a single color, for example, the black ink. In the ink cartridge shown in Fig. 1, the detection method implemented is based on a method, among methods described above, in which the position of the liquid surface in the liquid container and whether or not the liquid is empty are detected by receiving the reflected wave of the elastic wave. As a means for generating and receiving the elastic wave, an elastic wave generating means 3 is utilized. An ink supply port 2 which comes in contact with an ink supply needle of the recording apparatus in a sealed manner is provided in a container 1 which houses the ink. In an outside portion of a bottom face 1a of the container 1, the elastic wave generating means 3 is mounted such that the elastic wave can be communicated, via the container, to the ink inside the container. In order that at a stage at which

the ink K is almost used up, i.e. at the time when the ink becomes an ink-end state, the transfer of the elastic wave can change from the liquid to the gas, the elastic wave generating means 3 is provided in a slightly upward position from the ink supply port 2. Moreover, an elastic wave receiving means may be separately provided instead, so that the elastic wave generating means 3 is used as an elastic wave generating means only.

**[0046]** A packing ring 4 and a valve body 6 are provided in the ink supply port 2. Referring to Fig. 3, the packing ring 4 is engaged with the ink supply needle 32 communicating with a recording head 31, in a fluid-tight manner. The valve body 6 is constantly and elastically contacted against the packing ring 4 by way of a spring 5. When the ink supply needle 32 is inserted, the valve body 6 is pressed by the ink supply needle 32 so as to open an ink passage, so that ink inside the container 1 is supplied to the recording head 31 via the ink supply port 2 and the ink supply needle 32. On an upper wall of the container 1, there is mounted a semiconductor memory means 7 which stores data on ink inside the ink cartridge.

**[0047]** Fig. 2 is a perspective view of the ink cartridge which stores plural types of inks, viewed from a back side thereof, according to an embodiment. A container 8 is divided by division walls into three ink chambers 9, 10 and 11. Ink supply ports 12, 13 and 14 are formed for the respective ink chambers. In a bottom face 8a of the respective ink chambers 9, 10 and 11, the respective elastic wave generating means 15, 16 and 17 are mounted so that the elastic waves can be transferred to the ink housed in each ink chamber via the container.

**[0048]** Fig. 3 is a cross sectional view showing an embodiment of a major part of the ink-jet recording apparatus suitable for the ink cartridge shown in Fig. 1 and Fig. 2. A carriage 30 capable of reciprocating in the direction of the width of the recording paper is equipped with a sub-tank unit 33, while the recording head 31 is provided in a lower face of the sub-tank unit 33. Moreover, the ink supply needle 32 is provided in an ink cartridge mounting face side of the sub-tank unit 33.

**[0049]** Fig. 4 is a detailed cross sectional view of a sub-tank unit 33. The sub-tank unit 33 comprises the ink supply needle 32, the ink chamber 34, a flexible valve 36 and a filter 37. In the ink chamber 34, the ink is housed which is supplied from the ink cartridge via ink supply needle 32. The flexible valve 36 is so designed that the flexible valve 36 is opened and closed by means of the pressure difference between the ink chamber 34 and the ink supply passage 35. The sub-tank unit 33 is so constructed that the ink supply passage 35 is communicated with the recording head 31 so that the ink can be supplied up to the recording head 31.

**[0050]** Referring to Fig. 3, when the ink supply port 2 of the container 1 is inserted through the ink supply needle 32 of the sub-tank unit 33, the valve body 6 recedes against the spring 5, so that an ink passage is formed and the ink inside the container 1 flows into the ink chamber 34. At a stage where the ink chamber 34 is filled with ink, a negative pressure is applied to a nozzle opening of the recording head 31 so as to fill the recording head with ink. Thereafter, the recording operation is performed.

**[0051]** When the ink is consumed in the recording head 31 by the recording operation, a pressure in the downstream of the flexible valve 36 decreases. Then, the flexible valve 36 is positioned away from a valve body 38 so as to become opened. When the flexible valve 36 is opened, the ink in the ink chamber 34 flows into the recording head 31 through the ink passage 35. Accompanied by the ink which has flowed into the recording head 31, the ink in the container 1 flows into the sub-tank unit 33 via the ink supply needle 32.

**[0052]** While the recording apparatus is operating, a drive signal is supplied to the elastic wave generating means 3 at a detection timing which is set in advance, for example, at a certain period of time. The elastic wave generated by the elastic wave generating means 3 is transferred to the ink by propagating through the bottom face 1a of the container 1 so as to be propagated to the ink.

**[0053]** By adhering the elastic wave generating means 3 to the container 1, the ink cartridge itself is given an ink remaining amount detecting capability. According to the present embodiment, since a process of embedding electrodes for use in detecting the liquid surface is unnecessary in the course of forming the container 1, an injection molding process can be simplified and the leakage of the liquid from a place in which the electrodes are supposedly embedded can be avoided, thus improving the reliability of the ink cartridge.

**[0054]** Figs. 5(I) - 5(V) show manufacturing methods of the elastic wave generating means 3, 15, 16 and 17. A base plate 20 is formed by material such as the burning-endurable ceramic. Referring to Fig. 5(I), first of all, a conductive material layer 21 which becomes an electrode at one side is formed on the base plate 20. Next, referring to Fig. 5(II), a green sheet 22 serving as piezoelectric material is placed on the conductive material layer 21. Next, referring to Fig. 5(III), the green sheet 22 is formed in a predetermined shape by a press processing or the like and is made into the form of a vibrator, and is air-dried. Thereafter, the burning is performed on the green sheet 22 at a burning temperature of, for example, 1200 °C. Next, referring to Fig. 5(IV), a conductive material layer 23 serving as other electrode is formed on the surface of the green sheet 22 so as to be polarized in a flexural-oscillatable manner. Finally, referring to Fig. 5(V), the base plate 20 is cut along each element. By fixing the base plate 20 in a predetermined face of the container 1 by use of adhesive or the like, the elastic wave generating means 3 can be fixed on the predetermined face of the container and the ink cartridge is completed which has a built-in function which detects the ink remaining amount.

**[0055]** Fig. 6 shows another embodiment of the elastic wave generating means 3 shown in Fig. 5. In the embodi-

ment shown in Fig. 5, the conductive material layer 21 is used as a connecting electrode. On the other hand, in the embodiment shown in Fig. 6, connecting terminals 21a and 23a are formed by a solder in an upper position than the surface of the piezoelectric material layer comprised of the green sheet 22. By the provision of the connecting terminals 21a and 23a, the elastic wave generating means 3 can be directly mounted to the circuit board, so that inefficient connection such as one by lead wires can be avoided.

**[0056]** Now, the elastic wave is a type of waves which can propagate through gas, liquid and solid as medium. Thus, the wavelength, amplitude, phase, frequency, propagating direction and propagating velocity of the elastic wave change based on the change of medium in question. On the other hand, the state and characteristic of the reflected wave of the elastic wave change according to the change of the medium. Thus, by utilizing the reflected wave which changes based on the change of the medium through which the elastic wave propagates, the state of the medium can be observed. In a case where the state of the liquid inside the liquid container is to be detected by this method, an elastic wave transmitter-receiver will be used for example. Let us explain this by referring to embodiments shown in Figs. 1 - 3. First, the transmitter-receiver gives out the elastic wave to the medium, for example, the liquid or the liquid container. Then, the elastic wave propagates through the medium and arrives at the surface of the liquid. Since a boundary is formed between the liquid and the gas on the liquid surface, the reflected wave is returned to the transmitter-receiver. The transmitter-receiver receives the reflected wave. A distance between the liquid surface and a transmitter or receiver can be measured based on an overall traveled time of the reflected wave, or a damping factor of the amplitudes of the elastic wave generated by the transmitter and the reflected wave reflected on the liquid surface, and so on. Utilizing these, the state of the liquid inside the liquid container can be detected. The elastic wave generating means 3 may be used as a single unit of the transmitter-receiver in the method utilizing the reflected wave based on the change of the medium through which the elastic wave propagates, or a separately provided receiver may be mounted thereto.

**[0057]** As described above, in the elastic wave, generated by the elastic wave generating means 3, propagating through the ink liquid, the traveling time of the reflected wave occurring on the ink liquid surface to arrive at the elastic wave generating means 3 varies depending on density of the ink liquid and the liquid level. Thus, if the composition of ink is fixed, the traveling time of the reflected wave which occurred in the ink liquid surface varies depending on the ink amount. Therefore, the ink amount can be detected by detecting the time period during which the elastic wave generating means 3 generates the elastic wave and then the wave reflected from the ink surface arrives at the elastic wave generating means 3. Moreover, the elastic wave vibrates particles contained in the ink. Thus, in a case of using pigment-like ink which uses pigment as a coloring agent, the elastic wave contributes to prevent precipitation of the pigment or the like.

**[0058]** By providing the elastic wave generating means 3 in the container 1, when the ink of the ink cartridge approaches (decreases to) an ink-end state and the elastic wave generating means 3 can no longer receive the reflected wave, it is judged as an ink-near-end and thus can give indication to replace the cartridge.

**[0059]** Fig. 7 shows an ink cartridge according to another embodiment of the present invention. Plural elastic wave generating means 41-44 are provided on the side wall of the container 1, spaced at a variable interval from one another in the vertical direction. In the ink cartridge shown in Fig. 7, whether or not the ink is present at mounting levels of respective elastic wave generating means 41 - 44 can be detected by whether or not the ink is present at respective positions of the elastic wave generating means 41 - 44. For example, suppose that the liquid level of ink is at a point between the elastic wave generating means 44 and 43. Then, the elastic wave generating means 44 detects and judges that the ink is empty while the elastic wave generating means 41, 42 and 43 detect and judge respectively that the ink is present. Thus, it can be known that the liquid level of ink lies in a level between the elastic wave generating means 44 and 43. Thus, provision of the plural elastic wave generating means 41 - 44 makes possible to detect the ink remaining amount in a step-by-step manner.

**[0060]** Fig. 8 and Fig. 9 show ink cartridges according to still another embodiments of the present invention. In an embodiment shown in Fig. 8, an elastic wave generating means 65 is mounted in a bottom face 1a formed aslope in the vertical direction. In an embodiment shown in Fig. 9, an elastic wave generating means 66 of an elongated shape in the vertical direction is provided in the vicinity of the bottom face of a side wall 1b.

**[0061]** According to the embodiments shown in Fig. 8 and Fig. 9, when part of the elastic wave generating means 65 and 66 is exposed from the liquid surface, the traveled time of the reflected wave and the acoustic impedance of the elastic waves generated by the elastic wave generating means 65 continuously change corresponding to the change ( $\Delta h_1$ ,  $\Delta h_2$ ) of the liquid surface. Thus, the process from the ink-near-end state to the ink-end state of ink remaining amount can be accurately detected by detecting the degree of change in the traveled time of the reflected wave or the acoustic impedance of the elastic waves.

**[0062]** In the above embodiments, description has been made by exemplifying the ink cartridge of a type where the ink is directly stored in the liquid container. As still another embodiment of the ink cartridge, the above-described elastic wave generating means may be mounted on an ink cartridge of another type where the container 1 is loaded with a porous elastic member and the porous elastic member is impregnated with the liquid ink. Though in the above embodiments a flexural oscillating type piezoelectric vibrator is used so as to suppress the increase of the cartridge size, a



vertically vibrating type piezoelectric vibrator may also be used. In the above embodiments, the elastic wave is transmitted and received by a same elastic wave generating means. In still another embodiment, the elastic wave generating means may be provided separately as one for use in transmitting the elastic wave and other for receiving the elastic wave, so as to detect the ink remaining amount.

**[0063]** Fig. 10 shows an ink cartridge according to still another embodiment of the present invention. Plural elastic wave generating means 65a, 65b and 65c on the bottom face 1a formed a slope in the vertical direction spaced at an interval are provided in the container 1. According to the present embodiment, the arrival time (traveled time) of the reflected waves of the elastic waves to the respective elastic wave generating means 65a, 65b and 65c in the respective mounting positions of the elastic wave generating means 65a, 65b and 65c differs depending on whether or not the ink is present in the respective positions of the plural elastic wave generating means 65a, 65b and 65c. Thus, whether or not the ink is present in the respective mounted position levels of the elastic wave generating means 65a, 65b and 65c can be detected by scanning each elastic generating means (65a, 65b and 65c) and by detecting the traveled time of the reflected wave of the elastic wave in the elastic wave generating means 65a, 65b and 65c. Hence, the ink remaining amount can be detected in a step-by-step manner. For example, suppose that the liquid level of ink is at a point between the elastic wave generating means 65b and 65c. Then, the elastic wave generating means 65c detects and judges that the ink is empty while the elastic wave generating means 65a and 65b detect and judge respectively that the ink is present. By overall evaluating these results, it becomes known that the liquid level of ink lies in a level between the elastic wave generating means 65b and 65c.

**[0064]** Fig. 11 shows an ink cartridge according to still another embodiment of the present invention. In the ink cartridge shown in Fig. 11, a floating board 67 attached to a floater 68 covers the ink liquid surface in order to increase intensity of the reflected wave from the liquid surface. The floating board 67 is formed by material which has a high acoustic impedance therein and is ink-resistant, such as a ceramic board.

**[0065]** Fig. 12A and Fig. 12B shows another embodiments of the ink cartridge shown in Fig. 11. In the ink cartridge shown in Figs. 12A and 12b, similar to one shown in Fig. 11, a floating board 67 attached to a floater 68 covers the ink liquid surface in order to increase intensity of the reflected wave from the liquid surface. Referring to Fig. 12A, the elastic wave generating means 65 is fixed on the bottom face 1a formed aslope in the vertical direction. When the ink remaining amount becomes scarce and thus the elastic wave generating means 65 is exposed from the liquid surface, the arrival time of the reflected wave of the elastic waves generated by the elastic wave generating means 65 at the elastic wave generating means 65 changes, thus whether or not the ink is present in the mounting position levels of the elastic wave generating means 65 can be detected. Since the elastic wave generating means 65 is mounted in the bottom face 1a formed aslope in the vertical direction, a small amount of ink still remains even after the elastic wave generating means 65 detects and judges that ink is empty. Thus, the ink remaining amount at an ink-near-end point can be detected.

**[0066]** Referring to Fig. 12B, plural elastic wave generating means 65a, 65b and 65c on the bottom face 1a formed aslope in the vertical direction spaced at an interval are provided in the container 1. According to the present embodiment shown in Fig. 12B, the arrival time (traveled time) of the reflected waves of the elastic waves at the respective elastic wave generating means 65a, 65b and 65c in the respective mounting positions of the elastic wave generating means 65a, 65b and 65c differs depending on whether or not the ink is present in the respective positions of the plural elastic wave generating means 65a, 65b and 65c. Thus, whether or not the ink is present in the respective mounted position levels of the elastic wave generating means 65a, 65b and 65c can be detected by scanning each elastic generating means (65a, 65b and 65c) and by detecting the traveled time of the reflected wave of the elastic wave in the elastic wave generating means 65a, 65b and 65c. For example, suppose that the liquid level of ink is at a point between the elastic wave generating means 65b and 65c. Then, the elastic wave generating means 65c detects and judges that the ink is empty while the elastic wave generating means 65a and 65b detect and judge respectively that the ink is present. By overall evaluating these results, it becomes known that the liquid level of ink lies in a level between the elastic wave generating means 65b and 65c.

**[0067]** Fig. 13A and Fig. 13B show ink cartridges according to still another embodiment of the present invention. In the ink cartridge shown in Fig. 13A, an ink absorbing member 74 is arranged in such a manner that at least part of the ink absorbing member 74 is disposed counter to a through hole 1c provided inside the container 1. An elastic wave generating means 70 is fixed to the bottom face 1a of the container 1 such that the elastic wave generating means 70 is positioned counter to the through hole 1c. In the ink cartridge shown in Fig. 13B, an ink absorbing member 75 is arranged in such a manner that the ink absorbing member 75 is disposed counter to a groove 1h formed so as to communicate with the through hole 1c.

**[0068]** According to the present embodiment shown in Figs. 13A and 13B, when the ink has been consumed and then the ink absorbing members 74 and 75 are exposed from the ink, the ink in the ink absorbing members 74 and 75 flows out by its dead weight, so that the ink is supplied to the recording head 31. When the ink is used up, the ink absorbing members 74 and 75 absorb the ink remaining in the through hole 1c, so that the ink is completely discharged from a concave part of the through hole 1c. Thereby, the state of the reflected wave of the elastic wave generated by

the elastic wave generating means 70 changes at the time of the ink-end state, thus the ink-end state can be further reliably detected.

**[0069]** Figs. 14A, 14B and 14C show plan views of the through hole 1c according to another embodiment. As shown respectively in Figs. 14A, 14B and 14C, the plane shape of the through hole 1c may be of arbitrary shapes as long as the elastic wave generating means is capable of being mounted thereto.

**[0070]** Figs. 15A and 15B show cross sections of the ink-jet recording apparatus according to still another embodiment of the present invention. Fig. 15A shows a cross section of the ink-jet recording apparatus alone. Fig. 15B is a cross section of the ink-jet recording apparatus to which the ink cartridge 272 is mounted. A carriage 250 capable of reciprocating in the direction of the width of the ink-jet recording paper includes a recording head 252 in a lower face thereof. The carriage 250 includes a sub-tank unit 256 in an upper face of the recording head 252. The sub-tank unit 256 has a similar structure to that shown in Fig. 6. The sub-tank unit 256 has an ink supply needle 254 facing an ink cartridge 272 mounting side. In the carriage 250, there is provided a convex part 258 in a manner such that the convex part 258 is disposed counter to a bottom portion of the ink cartridge 272 and in an area where the ink cartridge 272 is to be mounted thereabove. The convex part 258 includes an elastic wave generating means 260 such as the piezoelectric vibrator.

**[0071]** Figs. 16A and 16B show an embodiment of the ink cartridge suitable for the recording apparatus shown in Figs. 15A and 15B. Fig. 16A shows an embodiment of the ink cartridge for use with a single color, for instance, the black color. The ink cartridge 272 according to the present embodiment, comprises a container which houses ink and an ink supply port 276 which comes in contact with an ink supply needle 254 of the recording apparatus in a sealed manner. In the container 274, there is provided the concave part 278, positioned in a bottom face 274a, which is to be engaged with the convex part 258. The concave part 278 houses ultrasound transferring material such as gelated material.

**[0072]** The ink supply port 276 includes a packing ring 282, a valve body 286 and a spring 284. The packing ring 282 is engaged with the ink supply needle 254 in a fluid-tight manner. The valve body 286 is constantly and elastically contacted against the packing ring 282 by way of the spring 284. When the ink supply needle 254 is inserted to the ink supply port 276, the valve body 286 is pressed by the ink supply needle 254 so as to open an ink passage. On an upper wall of the container 274, there is mounted a semiconductor memory means 288 which stores data on ink inside the ink cartridge and so on.

**[0073]** Fig. 16B shows an embodiment of the ink cartridge which houses plural types of ink. A container 290 is divided by division walls into plural areas, that are, three ink chambers 292, 294 and 296. The ink chambers 292, 294 and 296 have ink supply ports 298, 300 and 302, respectively. In the area counter to respective ink chambers 292, 294 and 296 in the bottom face 290a of the container 290, the gelated material 304 and 306 to propagate the elastic waves generated by the elastic wave generating means 260 is housed in a cylindrical shaped concave parts 310, 312 and 314.

**[0074]** Referring to Fig. 15B, when the ink supply port 276 of the ink cartridge 272 is inserted through the ink supply needle 254 of the sub-tank unit 256, the valve body 286 recedes against the spring 284, so that an ink passage is formed and the ink inside the ink cartridge 272 flows into the ink chamber 262. At a stage where the ink chamber 262 is filled with ink, a negative pressure is applied to a nozzle opening of the recording head 252 so as to fill the recording head with ink. Thereafter, the recording operation is performed. When the ink is consumed in the recording head 252 by the recording operation, a pressure in the downstream of a flexible valve 266 decreases. Then, the flexible valve 266 is positioned away from a valve body 270 so as to become opened. When the flexible valve 266 is opened, the ink in the ink chamber 262 flows into the recording head 252 through the ink passage 35. Accompanied by the ink which has flowed into the recording head 252, the ink in the ink cartridge 272 flows into the sub-tank unit 256.

**[0075]** While the recording apparatus is operating, a drive signal is supplied to the elastic wave generating means 260 at a detection timing which is set in advance, for example, at a certain period of time. The elastic wave generated by the elastic wave generating means 260 is radiated from the convex part 258 and is transferred to the ink inside the ink cartridge 272 by propagating through the gelated material 280 in the bottom face 274a of the ink cartridge 272. Though the elastic wave generating means 260 is provided in the carriage 250 in Figs. 15A and 15B, the elastic wave generating means 260 may be provided inside the sub-tank unit 256.

**[0076]** Since the elastic wave generated by the elastic wave generating means 260 propagates through the ink liquid, the traveling time of the reflected wave occurring on the ink liquid surface to arrive at the elastic wave generating means 260 varies depending on density of the ink liquid and the liquid level. Thus, if the composition of ink is fixed, the traveling time of the reflected wave which occurred in the ink liquid surface varies depending on the ink amount. Therefore, the ink amount can be detected by detecting the time duration during which the reflected wave arrives at the elastic wave generating means 260 from the ink liquid surface when the ink liquid surface is excited by the elastic wave generating means 260. Moreover, the elastic wave generated by the elastic wave generating means 260 vibrates particles contained in the ink. Thus, in a case of using pigment-like ink which uses pigment as a coloring agent, the elastic wave contributes to prevent precipitation of the pigment or the like.

**[0077]** After the printing operation and maintenance operation or the like and when the ink of the ink cartridge approaches (decreases to) an ink-end state and the elastic wave generating means 260 can no longer receive the

reflected wave even after the elastic wave generating means sends out the elastic wave, it is judged that the ink is in an ink-near-end state and thus this judgment can give indication to replace the cartridge anew. Moreover, when the ink cartridge 272 is not mounted properly to the carriage 250, the shape of the elastic wave from the elastic generating means 260 changes in an extreme manner. Utilizing this, warning can be given to a user in the event that the extreme change in the elastic wave is detected, so as to prompt the user to check on the ink cartridge 272.

**[0078]** The traveling time of the reflected wave of the elastic wave generated by the elastic wave generating means 260 is affected by the density of ink housed in the container 274. Since the density of ink may differ by the type of ink used, data on the types of ink are stored in a semiconductor memory means 288, so that a detection sequence can be set based on the data and thus the ink remaining amount can be further precisely detected.

**[0079]** Fig. 17 shows an ink cartridge 272 according to still another embodiment of the present invention. In the ink cartridge 272 shown in Fig. 17, the bottom face 274a is formed aslope in the vertical direction.

**[0080]** In the ink cartridge 272 shown in Fig. 17, when the ink remaining amount is becoming low and part of a radiating area of the elastic wave generating means 260 is exposed from the liquid surface, the traveled time of the reflected wave of the elastic waves generated by the elastic wave generating means 260 continuously changes corresponding to the change  $\Delta h1$  of the liquid surface. The  $\Delta h1$  denotes change of the height of the bottom face 274a in both ends of the gelated material 280. Thus, the process from the ink-near-end state to the ink-end state of ink remaining amount can be accurately detected by detecting the degree of change in the traveled time of the reflected wave of the elastic wave generating means 260.

**[0081]** Fig. 18 shows an ink cartridge 272 and an ink-jet recording apparatus according to still another embodiment of the present invention. The ink-jet recording apparatus shown in Fig. 18 includes a convex part 258' in a side face 274b in an ink supply port 276 side of the ink cartridge 272. The convex part 258' includes an elastic wave generating means 260'. Gelated material 280' is provided in the side face 274b of the ink cartridge 272 so as to engage with the convex part 258'. According to the ink cartridge 272 shown in Fig. 18, when the ink remaining amount is becoming low and part of a radiating area of the elastic wave generating means 260' is exposed from the liquid surface, the acoustic impedance of the reflected wave of the elastic waves generated by the elastic wave generating means 260' continuously change corresponding to the change  $\Delta h2$  of the liquid surface. The  $\Delta h2$  denotes difference in the height of both ends of the gelated material 280'. Thus, the process from the ink-near-end state to the ink-end state of ink remaining amount can be accurately detected by detecting the degree of change in the traveled time of the reflected wave of the elastic wave generating means 260 or change in the acoustic impedance.

**[0082]** In the above embodiments, description has been made by exemplifying the ink cartridge of a type where the ink is directly stored in the liquid container 274. As still another embodiment of the ink cartridge, the above-described elastic wave generating means 260 may be applied to an ink cartridge of another type where the container 274 is loaded with a porous elastic member and the porous elastic member is impregnated with the ink. In the above embodiments, the elastic wave is transmitted and received by the same elastic wave generating means 260 and 260' when the ink remaining amount is detected based on the reflected wave at the liquid surface. The present invention is not limited thereby and for example, as still another embodiment the elastic wave generating means 260 may be provided separately as one for use in transmitting the elastic wave and other for receiving the elastic wave, so as to detect the ink remaining amount.

**[0083]** Fig. 19 shows still another embodiment of the ink cartridge 272 shown in Fig. 16. A floating board 316 attached to a floater 318 covers the ink liquid in order to increase intensity of the reflected wave from the ink liquid surface. The floating board 316 is preferably formed of material which has high acoustic impedance and is ink-resistant such as ceramic or the like.

**[0084]** Fig. 20 and Fig. 21 shows a detail and equivalent circuit of an actuator 106, which is an embodiment of the piezoelectric device of the present invention. The actuator explained herein is used at least for the method which detects the liquid consumption status in the liquid container by detecting a change in acoustic impedance. Especially, the actuator is used for the method which detects the liquid consumption status in the liquid container by detecting at least the change in acoustic impedance by detecting the resonant frequency from residual vibration. Fig. 20(A) is an enlarged plan view of the actuator 106. Fig. 20(B) shows a B-B cross-section of the actuator 106. Fig. 20(C) shows a C-C cross-section of the actuator 106. Fig. 21(A) and Fig. 21(B) shows an equivalent circuit of the actuator 106. Each of Fig. 21(C) and Fig. 21(D) shows the actuator 106 and around the actuator 106, and the equivalent circuit of the actuator 106 when an ink is filled in the ink cartridge. Fig. 21(E) and Fig. 21(F) shows the actuator 106 and around the actuator 106, and the equivalent circuit of the actuator 106 when there is no ink in the ink cartridge.

**[0085]** The actuator 106 includes a base plate 178, a vibrating plate 176, a piezoelectric layer 160, an upper electrode 164 and a lower electrode 166, an upper electrode terminal 168, a lower electrode terminal 170, and a supplementary electrode 172. The base plate 178 has a circular shape opening 161 on approximately its center. The vibrating plate 176 is provided on one of the face, which is called as "right side" in following, of the base plate 178 such as to cover the opening 161. The piezoelectric layer 160 is disposed on right side of the surface of the vibrating plate 176. The upper electrode 164 and the lower electrode 166 sandwich the piezoelectric layer 160 from both sides. The upper

electrode terminal 168 connects to the upper electrode 164 electrically. The lower electrode terminal 170 connects to the lower electrode 166 electrically. The supplementary electrode 172 is disposed between the upper electrode 164 and the upper electrode terminal 168 and connects both of the upper electrode 164 and the upper electrode terminal 168. Each of the piezoelectric layer 160, upper electrode 164, and the lower electrode 166 has a circular portion as its main portion. Each of the circular portion of the piezoelectric layer 160, the upper electrode 164, and the lower electrode 166 form a piezoelectric element.

**[0086]** The vibrating plate 176 is formed on the right side of the surface of the base plate 178 to cover the opening 161. The cavity 162 is formed by the portion of the vibrating plate 176, which faces the opening 161, and the opening 161 of the on the surface of the base plate 178. The face of the base plate 178 which is opposite side of the piezoelectric element, called as "back side" in following, is faced with the liquid container side. The cavity 162 is constructed such that the cavity 162 contacts with liquid. The vibrating plate 176 is mounted on the base plate 178 such that the liquid does not leak to the right side of the surface of the base plate 178 even if the liquid enters inside the cavity 162.

**[0087]** The lower electrode 166 is located on the right side of the vibrating plate 176, that is, opposite side against the liquid container. The lower electrode 166 is provided on the vibrating plate 176 such that the center of the circular portion of the lower electrode 166, which is a main portion of the lower electrode 166, and the center of the opening 161 substantially matches. The area of the circular portion of the lower electrode 166 is set to be smaller than the area of the opening 161. The piezoelectric layer 160 is formed on the right side of the surface of the lower electrode 166 such that the center of the circular portion and the center of the opening 161 substantially match. The area of the circular portion of the piezoelectric layer 160 is set to be smaller than the area of the opening 161 and larger than the area of the circular portion of the lower electrode 166.

**[0088]** The upper electrode 164 is formed on the right side of the surface of the piezoelectric layer 160 such that the center of the circular portion, which is a piezoelectric layer 160, and the center of the opening 161 substantially match. The area of the circular portion of the upper electrode 164 is set to be smaller than the area of the circular portion of the opening 161 and the piezoelectric layer 160 and larger than the area of the circular portion of the lower electrode 166.

**[0089]** Therefore, the main portion of the piezoelectric layer 160 has a structure to be sandwiched by the main portion of the upper electrode 164 and the main portion of the lower electrode each from right side face and back side face, and thus the main portion of the piezoelectric layer 160 can effectively drive and deform the piezoelectric layer 160. The circular portion, which is a main portion of each of the piezoelectric layer 160, the upper electrode 164, and the lower electrode 166, forms the piezoelectric element in the actuator 106. As explained above, the electric element contacts with the vibrating plate. Within the circular portion of the upper electrode 164, circular portion of the piezoelectric layer 160, the circular portion of the lower electrode, and the opening 161, the opening 161 has the largest area. By this structure, the vibrating region which actually vibrates within the vibrating plate is determined by the opening 161. Furthermore, each of the circular portion of the upper electrode 164 and the circular portion of the piezoelectric layer 160 and the circular portion of the lower electrode has smaller area than the area of the opening 161, The vibrating plate becomes easily vibrate. Within the circular portion of the lower electrode 166 and the circular portion of the upper electrode 164 which connects to the piezoelectric layer 160 electrically, the circular portion of the lower electrode 166 is smaller than the circular portion of the upper electrode 164. Therefore, the circular portion of the lower electrode 166 determines the portion which generates the piezoelectric effect within the piezoelectric layer 160.

**[0090]** The center of the circular portion of the piezoelectric layer 160, the upper electrode 164, and the lower electrode 166, which form the piezoelectric element, substantially match to the center of the opening 161. Moreover, the center of the circular shape opening 161, which determines the vibrating section of the vibrating plate 176, is provided on the approximately center of the actuator 106. Therefore, the center of the vibrating section of the actuator 106 matches to the center of the actuator 106. Because the main portion of the piezoelectric element and the vibrating section of the vibrating plate 176 have a circular shape, the vibrating section of the actuator 106 is symmetrical about a center of the actuator 106.

**[0091]** Because the vibrating section is symmetrical about a center of the actuator 106, the excitation of the unnecessary vibration occurred owing to the asymmetric structure can be prevented. Therefore, the accuracy of detecting the resonant frequency increases. Furthermore, because the vibrating section is symmetric about the center of the actuator 106, the actuator 106 is easy to manufacture, and thus the unevenness of the shape for each of the piezoelectric element can be decreased. Therefore, the unevenness of the resonant frequency for each of the piezoelectric element 174 decreases. Furthermore, because the vibrating section has an isotropic shape, the vibrating section is difficult to be influenced by the unevenness of the fixing during the bonding process. That is, the vibrating section is bonded to the liquid container uniformly. Therefore, the actuator 106 is easy to assemble to the liquid container.

**[0092]** Furthermore, because the vibrating section of the vibrating plate 176 has a circular shape, the lower resonant mode, for example, the primary resonant mode dominates on the resonant mode of the residual vibration of the piezoelectric layer 160, and thus the single peak appears on the resonant mode. Therefore, the peak and the noise can be distinguished clearly so that the resonant frequency can be clearly detected. Furthermore, the accuracy of the

detection of the resonant frequency can be further increased by enlarge the area of the vibrating section of the circular shape vibrating plate 176 because the difference of the amplitude of the counter electromotive force and the difference of the amplitude of the resonant frequency occurred by whether the liquid exists inside the liquid container increase.

**[0093]** The displacement generated by the vibration of the vibrating plate 176 is larger than the displacement generated by the vibration of the base plate 178. The actuator 106 has a two layers structure that is constituted by the base plate 178 having a small compliance which means it is difficult to be displaced by the vibration, and the vibrating plate 176 having a large compliance which means it is easy to be displaced by the vibration. By this two layers structure, the actuator 106 can be reliably fixed to the liquid container by the base plate 178 and at the same time the displacement of the vibrating plate 176 by the vibration can be increased. Therefore, the difference of the amplitude of the counter electromotive force and the difference of the amplitude of the resonant frequency depended on whether the liquid exists inside the liquid container increases, and thus the accuracy of the detection of the resonant frequency increases. Furthermore, because the compliance of the vibrating plate 176 is large, the attenuation of the vibration decreases so that the accuracy of the detection of the resonant frequency increases. The node of the vibration of the actuator 106 locates on the periphery of the cavity 162, that is, around the margin of the opening 161.

**[0094]** The upper electrode terminal 168 is formed on the right side of the surface of the vibrating plate 176 to be electrically connected to the upper electrode 164 through the supplementary electrode 172. The lower electrode terminal 170 is formed on the right side of the surface of the vibrating plate 176 to be electrically connected to the lower electrode 166. Because the upper electrode 164 is formed on the right side of the piezoelectric layer 160, there is a difference in depth that is equal to the sum of the thickness of the piezoelectric layer 160 and the thickness of the lower electrode 166 between the upper electrode 164 and the upper electrode terminal 168. It is difficult to fill this difference in depth only by the upper electrode 164, and even it is possible to fill the difference in depth by the upper electrode 164, the connection between the upper electrode 164 and the upper electrode terminal 168 becomes weak so that the upper electrode 164 will be cut off. Therefore, this embodiment uses the supplementary electrode 172 as a supporting member to connects the upper electrode 164 and the upper electrode terminal 168. By this supplementary electrode 172, both of the piezoelectric layer 160 and the upper electrode 164 are supported by the supplementary electrode 172, and thus the upper electrode 164 can have desired mechanical strength, and also the upper electrode 164 and the upper electrode terminal 168 can be firmly connected.

**[0095]** The piezoelectric element and the vibrating section which faces to the piezoelectric element within the vibrating plate 176 constitute the vibrating section which actually vibrates in the actuator 106. Moreover, it is preferable to form the actuator 106 in one body by firing together the member included in the actuator 106. By forming the actuator 106 as one body, the actuator 106 becomes easy to be handled. Further, the vibration characteristic increases by increasing the strength of the base plate 178. That is, by increasing the strength of the base plate 178, only the vibrating section of the actuator 106 vibrates, and the portion other than the vibrating section of the actuator 106 does not vibrates. Furthermore, the prevention of the vibration of the portion other than the vibrating section of the actuator 106 can be achieved by increasing the strength of the base plate 178 and at the same time forming the actuator 106 as thinner and smaller as possible and forming the vibrating plate 176 as thinner as possible.

**[0096]** It is preferable to use lead zirconate titanate (PZT), lead lanthanum zirconate titanate (PLZT), or piezoelectric membrane without using lead as a material for the piezoelectric layer 160. It is preferable to use zirconia or aluminum as a material of the base plate 178. Furthermore, it is preferable to use same material as base plate 178 for a material of vibrating plate 176. The metal such as gold, silver, copper, platinum, aluminum, and nickel having a electrical conductivity can be used for the material of the upper electrode 164, the lower electrode 166, the upper electrode terminal 168, and the lower electrode terminal 170.

**[0097]** The actuator 106 constructed as explained above can be applied to the container which contains liquid. For example, the actuator 106 can be mounted on an ink cartridge used for the ink jet recording apparatus, an ink tank, or a container which contains washing liquid to wash the recording head.

**[0098]** The actuator 106 shown in the Fig. 20 and Fig. 21 is mounted on the predetermined position on the liquid container so that the cavity 162 can contact with the liquid contained inside the liquid container. When the liquid container is filled with liquid sufficiently, the inside and outside of the cavity 162 is filled with liquid. On the other hand, if the liquid inside liquid container consumed and the liquid level decreased under the mounting position of the actuator, there are conditions that liquid does not exit inside the cavity 162 or that liquid is remained only in the cavity 162 and air exits on outside the cavity 162. The actuator 106 detects at least the difference in the acoustic impedance occurred by this change in condition. By this detection of the difference in acoustic impedance, the actuator 106 can detects the whether the liquid is sufficiently filled in the liquid container or liquid is consumed more than predetermined level. Furthermore, the actuator 106 can detects the type of the liquid inside the liquid container.

**[0099]** The principle of the detection of the liquid level by the actuator will be explained.

**[0100]** To detect the acoustic impedance of a medium, an impedance characteristic or an admittance characteristic is measured. To measure the impedance characteristic or the admittance characteristic, for example, transmission circuit can be used. The transmission circuit applies a constant voltage on the medium and measure a current flow

through the medium with changing a frequency. The transmission circuit provides a constant current to the medium and measures a voltage applied on the medium with changing a frequency. The change in current value and the voltage value measured at the transmission circuit shows the change in acoustic impedance. Furthermore, the change in a frequency  $f_{in}$ , which is a frequency when the current value or the voltage value becomes maximum or minimum, also shows the change in acoustic impedance.

**[0101]** Other than method shown above, the actuator can detect the change in the acoustic impedance of the liquid using the change only in the resonant frequency. The piezoelectric element, for example, can be used in a case of using the method of detecting the resonant frequency by measuring the counter electromotive force generated by the residual vibration, which is remained in the vibrating section after the vibration of the vibrating section of the actuator, as a method of using the change in the acoustic impedance of the liquid. The piezoelectric element is element which generates the counter electromotive force by residual vibration remained in the vibrating section of the actuator. The magnitude of the counter electromotive force changes with the amplitude of the vibrating section of the actuator. Therefore, the larger the amplitude of the vibrating section of the actuator, the easier to detect the resonant frequency. Moreover, depends on the frequency of the residual vibration at the vibrating section of the actuator, the period, on which the magnitude of the counter electromotive force changes, changes. Therefore, the frequency of the vibrating section of the actuator corresponds to the frequency of the counter electromotive force. Here, the resonant frequency means the frequency when the vibrating section of the actuator and the medium, which contacts to the vibrating section, are in a resonant condition.

**[0102]** To obtain the resonant frequency  $f_s$ , the waveform obtained by measuring the counter electromotive force when the vibrating section and the medium are in resonant condition is Fourier transformed. Because the vibration of the actuator is not a displacement for only one direction, but the vibration involves the deformation such as deflection and extension, the vibration has various kinds of frequency including the resonant frequency  $f_s$ . Therefore, the resonant frequency  $f_s$  is judged by Fourier transforming the waveform of the counter electromotive force when the piezoelectric element and the medium are in the resonant condition and then specifying the most dominating frequency components.

**[0103]** The frequency  $f_m$  is a frequency when the admittance of the medium is maximum or the impedance is minimum. The frequency  $f_m$  is different from the resonant frequency  $f_s$  with little value because of the dielectric loss and the mechanical loss. However, the frequency  $f_m$  is generally used as substitution for resonant frequency because it needs time for deriving the resonant frequency  $f_s$  from the frequency  $f_m$  which is actually measured. By inputting output of the actuator 106 to the transmission circuit, the actuator 106 can at least detect the acoustic impedance.

**[0104]** It is proved by the experiment that there is almost no differences with the resonant frequency obtained by the method, which measures the frequency  $f_m$  by measuring the impedance characteristic and admittance characteristic of the medium, and the method, which measures the resonant frequency  $f_s$  by measuring the counter electromotive force generated by the residual vibration at the vibrating section of the actuator.

**[0105]** The vibrating region of the actuator 106 is a portion which constitutes the cavity 162 that is determined by the opening 161 within the vibrating plate 176. When liquid is sufficiently filled in the liquid container, liquid is filled in the cavity 162, and the vibrating region contacts with liquid inside the liquid container. When liquid does not exist in the liquid container sufficiently, the vibrating region contacts with the liquid which is remained in the cavity inside the liquid container, or the vibrating region does not contacts with the liquid but contacts with the gas or vacuum.

**[0106]** The cavity 162 is provided on the actuator 106 of the present invention, and it can be designed that the liquid inside the liquid container remains in the vibrating region of the actuator 106 by the cavity 162. The reason will be explained as follows.

**[0107]** Depends on the mounting position and mounting angle of the actuator 106 on the liquid container, there is a case in which the liquid attaches to the vibrating region of the actuator even the liquid level in the liquid container is lower than the mounting position of the actuator. When the actuator detects the existence of the liquid only from the existence of the liquid on the vibrating region, the liquid attached to the vibrating region of the actuator prevents the accurate detection of the existence of the liquid. For example, If the liquid level is lower than the mounting position of the actuator, and the drop of the liquid attaches to the vibrating region by the waving of the liquid caused by the shaking of the liquid container caused by the movement of the carriage, the actuator 106 will misjudges that there is enough liquid in the liquid container. In this way, the malfunction can be prevented by using the actuator having cavity.

**[0108]** Furthermore, as shown in Fig. 21(E), the case when the liquid does not exit in the liquid container and the liquid of the liquid container remains in the cavity 162 of the actuator 106 is set as the threshold value of the existence of the liquid. That is, if the liquid does not exist around the cavity 162, and the amount of the liquid in the cavity is smaller than this threshold value, it is judged that there is no ink in the liquid container. If the liquid exist around the cavity 162, and the amount of the liquid is larger than this threshold value, it is judged that there is ink in the liquid container. For example, when the actuator 106 is mounted on the side wall of the liquid container, it is judged that there is no ink in the liquid container when the liquid level inside the liquid container is lower than the mounting position of the actuator 106, and it is judged that there is ink inside the liquid container when the liquid level inside the liquid container is higher than the mounting position of the actuator 106. By setting the threshold value in this way, the actuator 106 can judge that



there is no ink in the liquid container even if the ink attaches to the cavity again by shaking of the carriage after the ink in the cavity disappears because the amount of the ink attaches to the cavity again does not exceed the threshold value.

**[0109]** The operation and the principle of detecting the liquid condition of the liquid container from the resonant frequency of the medium and the vibrating section of the actuator 106 obtained by measuring the counter electromotive force will be explained reference to Fig. 20 and Fig. 21. A voltage is applied on each of the upper electrode 164 and the lower electrode 166 through the upper electrode terminal 168 and the lower electrode terminal 170. The electric field is generated on the portion of the piezoelectric layer 160 where the piezoelectric layer 160 is sandwiched by the upper electrode 164 and the lower electrode 166. By this electric field, the piezoelectric layer 160 deforms. By the deformation of the piezoelectric layer 160, the vibrating region within the vibrating plate 176 deflects and vibrates. For some period after the deformation of the piezoelectric layer 160, the vibration with deflection remains in the vibrating section of the actuator 106.

**[0110]** The residual vibration is a free oscillation of the vibrating section of the actuator 106 and the medium. Therefore, the resonant condition between the vibrating section and the medium can be easily obtained by applying the voltage of a pulse wave or a rectangular wave on the piezoelectric layer 160. Because the residual vibration vibrates the vibrating section of the actuator 106, the residual vibration also deforms the piezoelectric layer 160. Therefore, the piezoelectric layer 160 generates the counter electromotive force. This counter electromotive force is detected through the upper electrode 164, the lower electrode 166, the upper electrode terminal 168, and the lower electrode terminal 170. Because the resonant frequency can be specified by this detected counter electromotive force, the liquid consumption status in the liquid container can be detected.

**[0111]** Generally, the resonant frequency  $f_s$  can be expressed as following.

$$f_s = 1/(2 \cdot \pi \cdot (M \cdot C_{act})^{1/2}) \quad (1)$$

where M denotes the sum of an inertance of the vibrating section  $M_{act}$  and an additional inertance  $M'$ ;  $C_{act}$  denotes a compliance of the vibrating section.

**[0112]** Fig. 20(C) shows a cross section of the actuator 106 when the ink does not exist in the cavity in the present embodiment. Fig. 21(A) and Fig. 21(B) shows the equivalent circuit of the vibrating section of the actuator 106 and the cavity 162 when the ink does not exist in the cavity.

**[0113]** The  $M_{act}$  is obtained by dividing the product of the thickness of the vibrating section and the density of the vibrating section by the area of the vibrating section. Furthermore, as shown in the Fig. 21(A), the  $M_{act}$  can be expressed as following in detail.

$$M_{act} = M_{pzt} + M_{electrode1} + M_{electrode2} + M_{vib} \quad (2)$$

Here,  $M_{pzt}$  is obtained by dividing the product of the thickness of the piezoelectric layer 160 in the vibrating section and the density of the piezoelectric layer 160 by the area of the piezoelectric layer 160.  $M_{electrode1}$  is obtained by dividing the product of the thickness of the upper electrode 164 in the vibrating section and the density of the upper electrode 164 by the area of the upper electrode 164.  $M_{electrode2}$  is obtained by dividing the product of the thickness of the lower electrode 166 in the vibrating section and the density of the lower electrode 166 by the area of the lower electrode 166.

$M_{vib}$  is obtained by dividing the product of the thickness of the vibrating plate 176 in the vibrating section and the density of the vibrating plate 176 by the area of the vibrating region of the vibrating plate 176. However each of the size of the area of the vibrating region of the piezoelectric layer 160, the upper electrode 164, the lower electrode 166, and vibrating plate 176 have a relationship as shown above, the difference among each of the area of the vibrating region is prefer to be microscopic to enable the calculation of the  $M_{act}$  from the thickness, density, and area as whole of the vibrating section. Moreover, it is preferable that the portion other than the circular portion which is a main portion of each of the piezoelectric layer 160, the upper electrode 164, and the lower electrode 166 is microscopic so that it can be ignored compared to the main portion. Therefore,  $M_{act}$  is sum of the inertance of the each of the vibrating region of the upper electrode 164, the lower electrode 166, the piezoelectric layer 160, and the vibrating plate 176 in the actuator 106. Moreover, the compliance  $C_{act}$  is a compliance of the portion formed by the each of the vibrating region of the upper electrode 164, the lower electrode 166, the piezoelectric layer 160, and the vibrating plate 176.

**[0114]** Fig. 21(A), Fig. 21(B), Fig. 21(D), and Fig. 21(F) show the equivalent circuit of the vibrating section of the actuator 106 and the cavity 162. In these equivalent circuits,  $C_{act}$  shows a compliance of the vibrating section of the actuator 106. Each of the  $C_{pzt}$ ,  $C_{electrode1}$ ,  $C_{electrode2}$ , and  $C_{vib}$  shows the compliance of the vibrating section of the piezoelectric layer 160, the upper electrode 164, the lower electrode 166, and the vibrating plate 176.  $C_{act}$  can be shown as following equation.

$$1/C_{act} = (1/C_{pzt}) + (1/C_{electrode1}) + (1/C_{electrode2}) + (1/C_{vib}) \quad (3)$$

[0115] From the equation (2) and (3), Fig. 21(A) can be expressed as Fig. 21(B).

[0116] The compliance  $C_{act}$  shows the volume which can accept the medium by the deformation generated by the application of the pressure on the unit area of the vibrating section. In other words, the compliance  $C_{act}$  shows the easiness to be deformed.

[0117] Fig. 21(C) shows the cross section of the actuator 106 when the liquid is sufficiently filled in the liquid container, and the periphery of the vibrating region of the actuator 106 is filled with the liquid. The  $M'_{max}$  shown in Fig. 21(C) shows the maximum value of the additional inertance when the liquid is sufficiently filled in the liquid container, and the periphery of the vibrating region of the actuator 106 is filled with the liquid. The  $M'_{max}$  can be expressed as

$$M'_{max} = (\pi \cdot \rho / (2 \cdot k^3)) \cdot (2 \cdot (2 \cdot k \cdot a)^3 / (3 \cdot \pi)) / (\pi \cdot a^2)^2 \quad (4)$$

where  $a$  denotes the radius of the vibrating section;  $\rho$  denotes the density of the medium; and  $k$  denotes the wave number. The equation (4) applies when the vibrating region of the actuator 106 is circular shape having the radius of " $a$ ". The additional inertance  $M'$  shows the quantity that the mass of the vibrating section is increased virtually by the effect of the medium which exists around the vibrating section.

[0118] As shown in Fig. 4, the  $M'_{max}$  can change significantly by the radius of the vibrating section " $a$ " and the density of the medium  $\rho$ .

[0119] The wave number  $k$  can be expressed by following equation.

$$k = 2 \cdot \pi \cdot \text{fact} / c \quad (5)$$

where  $\text{fact}$  denotes the resonant frequency of the vibrating section when the liquid does not contact with the vibrating section; and  $c$  denotes the speed of the sound propagate through the medium.

[0120] Fig. 21(D) shows an equivalent circuit of the vibrating section of the actuator 106 and the cavity 162 as in the case of Fig. 21(C) when the liquid is sufficiently filled in the liquid container, and the periphery of the vibrating region of the actuator 106 is filled with the liquid.

[0121] Fig. 21(E) shows the cross section of the actuator 106 when the liquid in the liquid container is consumed, and there is no liquid, around the vibrating region of the actuator 106, and the liquid remains in the cavity 162 of the actuator 106. The equation (4) shows the maximum inertance  $M'_{max}$  determined by such as the ink density  $\rho$  when the liquid container is filled with the liquid. On the other hand, if the liquid in the liquid container is consumed and liquid existed around the vibrating section of the actuator 106 becomes gas or vacuum with the liquid remaining in the cavity 162, the  $M'$  can be expressed as following equation.

$$M' = \rho \cdot t / S \quad (6)$$

where  $t$  denotes the thickness of the medium related to the vibration;  $S$  denotes the area of the vibrating region of the actuator 106. If this vibrating region is circular shape having a radius of " $a$ ", the  $S$  can be shown as  $S = \pi \cdot a^2$ . Therefore, the additional inertance  $M'$  follows the equation (4) when the liquid is sufficiently filled in the liquid container, and the periphery of the vibrating region of the actuator 106 is filled with the liquid. The additional inertance  $M'$  follows the equation (6) when the liquid in the liquid container is consumed, and there is no liquid exists around the vibrating region of the actuator 106, and the liquid is remained in the cavity 162.

[0122] Here, as shown in Fig. 21(E), let the additional inertance  $M'$ , when the liquid in the liquid container is consumed, and there is no liquid exists around the vibrating region of the actuator 106, and the liquid is remained in the cavity 162, as  $M'_{cav}$  to distinguish with the additional inertance  $M'_{max}$ , which is the additional inertance when the periphery of the vibrating region of the actuator 106 is filled with the liquid.

[0123] Fig. 21(F) shows an equivalent circuit of the vibrating section of the actuator 106 and the cavity 162 in the case of Fig. 21(E) when the liquid in the liquid container is consumed, and there is no liquid around the vibrating region of the actuator 106, and the liquid remains in the cavity 162 of the actuator 106.

[0124] Here, the parameters related to the status of the medium are density of the medium  $\rho$  and the thickness of the medium  $t$  in equation (6). When the liquid is sufficiently filled in the liquid container, the liquid contacts with the vibrating section of the actuator 106. When the liquid is insufficiently filled in the liquid container, the liquid is remained in the cavity, or the gas or vacuum contacts with the vibrating section of the actuator 106. If let the additional inertance during the process of the shifting from the  $M'_{max}$  of Fig. 21(C) to the  $M'_{var}$  of Fig. 21(E) when the liquid around the actuator 106 is consumed, because the thickness of the medium  $t$  changes according to the containing status of the liquid in the liquid container, the additional inertance  $M'_{var}$  changes, and resonant frequency also changes. Therefore, the existence of the liquid in the liquid container can be detected by specify the resonant frequency. Here, if let  $t = d$ , as shown in Fig. 21(E) and using the equation (6) to express the  $m'_{cav}$ , the equation (7) can be obtained by substituting the thickness of the cavity " $d$ " into the " $t$ " in the equation (6).



$$M'_{cav} = \rho * d / S \quad (7)$$

**[0125]** Moreover, if the medium are different types of liquid with each other, the additional inertance  $M'$  changes and resonant frequency  $f_s$  also changes because the density  $\rho$  is different according to the difference of the composition. Therefore, the types of the liquid can be detected by specifying the resonant frequency  $f_s$ . Moreover, when only one of the ink or air contacts with the vibrating section of the actuator 106, and the ink and air is not existing together, the difference in  $M'$  can be detected by calculating the equation (4).

**[0126]** Fig. 22 (A) is a graph which shows the relationship between the ink quantity inside the ink tank and the resonant frequency  $f_s$  of the ink and the vibrating section. Here, the case for the ink will be explained as an example of the liquid. The vertical axis shows the resonant frequency  $f_s$ , and the horizontal axis shows the ink quantity. When the ink composition is constant, the resonant frequency increases according to the decreasing of the ink quantity.

**[0127]** When ink is sufficiently filled in the ink container, and ink is filled around the vibrating region of the actuator 106, the maximum additional inertance  $M'_{max}$  becomes the value shown in the equation (4). When the ink is consumed, and there is no ink around the vibrating region of the actuator 106, and the ink remains in the cavity 162, the additional inertance  $M'_{var}$  is calculated by the equation (6) based on the thickness of the medium  $t$ . Because the " $t$ " used in the equation (6) is the thickness of the medium related to the vibration, the process during which the ink is consumed gradually can be detected by forming the " $d$ " (refer to Fig. 20(B)) of the cavity 162 of the actuator 106 as small as possible, that is, forming the thickness of the base plate 178 as sufficiently thinner as possible (refer to Fig. 21(C)). Here, let the  $t$ -ink as the thickness of the ink involved with the vibration, and  $t$ -ink-max as the  $t$ -ink when the additional inertance is  $M'_{max}$ . For example, the actuator 106 is mounted on the bottom of the ink cartridge horizontally to the surface of the ink. If ink is consumed, and the ink level becomes lower than the height  $t$ -ink-max from the actuator 106, the  $M'_{var}$  gradually changes according to the equation (6), and the resonant frequency  $f_s$  gradually changes according to the equation (1). Therefore, until the ink level is within the range of " $t$ ", the actuator 106 can gradually detect the ink consumption status.

**[0128]** Furthermore, by enlarge or lengthen the vibrating section of the actuator 106 and arrange the actuator 106 along a lengthwise direction, the " $S$ " in the equation (6) changes according to the change of ink level with ink consumption. Therefore, the actuator 106 can detect the process while the ink is gradually consumed. For example, the actuator 106 is mounted on the side wall of the ink cartridge perpendicularly to the ink surface. When the ink is consumed and the ink level reaches to the vibrating region of the actuator 106, because the additional inertance  $M'$  decreases with the decreasing of the ink level, the resonant frequency  $f_s$  gradually increases according to the equation (1). Therefore, unless the ink level is within the range of the radius  $2a$  of the cavity 162 (refer to Fig. 21(C)), the actuator 106 can gradually detect the ink consumption status.

**[0129]** The curve X in Fig. 22(A) shows the relationship between the ink quantity contained inside of the ink tank and the resonant frequency  $f_s$  of the ink and the vibrating section when the vibrating region of the actuator 106 is formed sufficiently large or long. It can be understand that the resonant frequency  $f_s$  of the ink and vibrating section gradually changes with the decrease of the ink quantity inside the ink tank.

**[0130]** In detail, the case when the actuator 106 can detect the process of the gradual consumption of the ink is the case when the liquid and gas having different density with each other are existed together and also involved with vibration. According to the gradual consumption of the ink, the liquid decreases with increasing of the gas in the medium involved with the vibration around the vibrating region of the actuator 106. For example, the case when the actuator 106 is mounted on the ink cartridge horizontally to the ink surface, and  $t$ -ink is smaller than the  $t$ -ink-max, the medium involved with the vibration of the actuator 106 includes both of the ink and the gas. Therefore, the following equation (8) can be obtained if let the area of the vibrating region of the actuator 106 as  $S$  and express the status when the additional inertance is below  $M'_{max}$  in the equation (4) by additional mass of the ink and the gas.

$$M' = M'_{air} + M'_{ink} = \rho_{air} * t_{air} / S + \rho_{ink} * t_{ink} / S \quad (8)$$

where  $M'_{max}$  is an inertance of an air;  $M'_{ink}$  is an inertance of an ink;  $\rho_{air}$  is a density of an air;  $\rho_{ink}$  is a density of an ink;  $t_{air}$  is the thickness of the air involved with the vibration; and  $t_{ink}$  is the thickness of the ink involved with the vibration. In case when the actuator 106 is mounted on the ink cartridge approximately horizontally to the ink surface, the  $t$ -air increases and the  $t$ -ink decreases with the increase of the gas and the decrease of the ink within the medium involved with the vibration around the vibrating region of the actuator 106. The additional inertance  $M'$  gradually decreases, and the resonant frequency gradually increases by above changes of the  $t$ -air and the  $t$ -ink. Therefore, the ink quantity remained inside the ink tank or the ink consumption quantity can be detected. The equation (7) depends only on the density of the liquid because of the assumption that the density of the air is small compare to the density of the liquid so that the density of the air can be ignored.

**[0131]** When the actuator 106 is provided on the ink cartridge substantially perpendicular to the ink surface, the status can be expressed as the equivalent circuit, not shown in the figure, on which the region, where the medium involved

with the vibration of the actuator 106 is ink only, and the region, where the medium involved with the vibration of the actuator 106 is gas, can be expressed as parallel circuit. If let the area of the region where the medium involved with the vibration of the actuator 106 is ink only as Sink, and let the area of the region where the medium involved with the vibration of the actuator 106 is gas only as S air, the following equation (9) can be obtained.  $1/M' = 1/M'_{\text{air}} + 1/M'_{\text{ink}} = S_{\text{air}}/(\rho_{\text{air}} \cdot t_{\text{air}}) +$

$$S_{\text{ink}}/(\rho_{\text{ink}} \cdot t_{\text{ink}}) \quad (9)$$

**[0132]** The equation (9) can be applied when the ink is not held in the cavity of the actuator 106. The case when the ink is held in the cavity can be calculated using the equation (7), (8), and (9).

**[0133]** In the case when the thickness of the base plate 178 is thick, that is, the depth of the cavity 162 is deep and d is comparatively close to the thickness of the medium t-ink-max, or in the case when using actuator having a very small vibrating region compared to height of the liquid container, the actuator does not detect the process of the gradual decrease of the ink but actually detects whether the ink level is higher or lower than the mounting position of the actuator. In other words, the actuator detects the existence of the ink at the vibrating region of the actuator. For example, the curve Y in Fig. 22 (A) shows the relationship between the ink quantity in the ink tank and the resonant frequency fs of the vibrating section when the vibrating section is small circular shape. The curve Y shows that the resonant frequency fs of the ink and the vibrating section changes extremely during the range of change of ink quantity Q, which corresponds to the status before and after the ink level in the ink tank passes the mounting position of the actuator. By this changes of the resonant frequency fs, it can be detected whether the ink quantity remained in the ink tank is more than the predetermined quantity.

**[0134]** The method of using the actuator 106 for detecting the existence of the liquid is more accurate than the method which calculates the quantity of ink consumption by the software because the actuator 106 detects the existence of the ink by directly contacting with the liquid. Furthermore, the method using an electrode to detect the existence of the ink by conductivity is influenced by the mounting position to the liquid container and the ink type, but the method using the actuator 106 to detect the existence of the liquid does not influenced by the mounting position to the liquid container and the ink type. Moreover, because both of the oscillation and detection of the existence of the liquid can be done by the single actuator 106, the number of the sensor mounted on the liquid container can be reduced compare to the method using separate sensor for oscillation and the detection of the existence of the liquid. Therefore, the liquid container can be manufactured at a low price. Furthermore, the sound generated by the actuator 106 during the operation of the actuator 106 can be reduced by setting the vibrating frequency of the piezoelectric layer 160 out of the audio frequency.

**[0135]** Fig. 22(B) shows the relationship between the density of the ink and the resonant frequency fs of the ink and the vibrating section of the curve Y shown in Fig. 22(A). Ink is used as an example of liquid. As shown in Fig. 22(B), when ink density increases, the resonant frequency fs decreases because the additional inertance increases. In other words, the resonant frequency fs are different with the types of the ink. Therefore, By measuring the resonant frequency fs, it can be confirmed whether the ink of a different density has been mixed together during the re-filling of the ink to the ink tank.

**[0136]** Therefore, the actuator 106 can distinguish the ink tank which contains the different type of the ink.

**[0137]** The condition when the actuator 106 can accurately detects the status of the liquid will be explained in detail in following. The case is assumed that the size and the shape of the cavity is designed so that the liquid can be remained in the cavity 162 of the actuator 106 even when the liquid inside the liquid container is empty. The actuator 106 can detect the status of the liquid even when the liquid is not filled in the cavity 162 if the actuator 106 can detect the status of the liquid when the liquid is filled in the cavity 162.

**[0138]** The resonant frequency fs is a function of the inertance M. The inertance M is a sum of the inertance of the vibrating section M act and the additional inertance M'. Here, the additional inertance M' has the relationship with the status of the liquid. The additional inertance M' is a quantity of a virtual increase of a mass of the vibrating section by the effect of the medium existed around the vibrating section. In other words, the additional inertance M' is the amount of increase of the mass of the vibrating section which is increased by the vibration of the vibrating section that virtually absorbs the medium.

**[0139]** Therefore, when the M'cav is larger than the M'max in the equation (4), all the medium which is virtually absorbed is the liquid remained in the cavity 162. Therefore, the status when the M'cav is larger than the M'max is same with the status that the liquid container is fill with liquid. The resonant frequency fs does not change because the M' does not change in this case. Therefore, the actuator 106 cannot detect the status of the liquid in the liquid container.

**[0140]** On the other hand, if the M'cav is smaller than the M'max in the equation (4), the medium which is virtually absorbed is the liquid remained in the cavity 162 and the gas or vacuum in the liquid container. In this case, because the M' changes, which is different with the case when the liquid is filled in the liquid container, the resonant frequency fs changes. Therefore, the actuator 106 can detect the status of the liquid in the liquid container.

**[0141]** The condition whether the actuator 106 can accurately detect the status of the liquid is that the  $M'_{cav}$  is smaller than the  $M'_{max}$  when the liquid is remained in the cavity 162 of the actuator 106, and the liquid container is empty. The condition  $M'_{max} > M'_{cav}$ , on which the actuator 106 can accurately detect the status of the liquid, does not depend on the shape of the cavity 162.

**[0142]** Here, the  $M'_{cav}$  is the mass of the liquid of the volume which is substantially equal to the volume of the cavity 162. Therefore, the condition, which can detect the status of the liquid accurately, can be expressed as the condition of the volume of the cavity 162 from the inequality  $M'_{max} > M'_{cav}$ . For example, if let the radius of the opening 161 of the circular shaped cavity 162 as "a" and the thickness of the cavity 162 as "d", then the following inequality can be obtained.

$$M'_{max} > \rho \cdot d / \pi a^2 \quad (10)$$

By expanding the inequality (10), the following condition can be obtained.

$$a/d > 3\pi/8 \quad (11)$$

The inequality (10) and (11) are valid only when the shape of the cavity 162 is circular. By using the equation when the  $M'_{max}$  is not circular and substituting the area  $\pi a^2$  with its area, the relationship between the dimension of the cavity such as a width and a length of the cavity and the depth can be derived.

**[0143]** Therefore, if the actuator 106 has the cavity 162 which has the radius of the opening 161 "a" and the depth of the cavity "d" that satisfy the condition shown in inequality (11), the actuator 106 can detect the liquid status without malfunction even when the liquid container is empty and the liquid is remained in the cavity 162.

**[0144]** Because the additional inertance influences the acoustic impedance characteristic, it can be said that the method of measuring the counter electromotive force generated in actuator 106 by residual vibration measures at least the change of the acoustic impedance.

**[0145]** Furthermore, according to the present embodiment, the actuator 106 generates the vibration, and the actuator 106 itself measures the counter electromotive force in actuator 106 which is generated by the residual vibration remained after the vibration of the actuator 106. However, it is not necessary for the vibrating section of the actuator 106 to provide the vibration to the liquid by the vibration of the actuator 106 itself which is generated by the driving voltage. Even the vibrating section itself does not oscillates, the piezoelectric layer 160 deflects and deforms by vibrates together with the liquid, which contacts with the vibrating section with some range. This residual vibration generates the counter electromotive force voltage in the piezoelectric layer 160 and transfer this counter electromotive force voltage to the upper electrode 164 and the lower electrode 166. The status of the liquid can be detected using this phenomenon. For example, in case of the ink jet recording apparatus, the status of the ink tank or the ink contained inside the ink tank can be detected using the vibration around the vibrating section of the actuator which is generated by the vibration generated by the reciprocating motion of the carriage to scanning the print head during the printing operation.

**[0146]** Fig. 23(A) and Fig. 23(B) shows a waveform of the residual vibration of the actuator 106 and the measuring method of the residual vibration. The change of the ink level at the level of the mounting position of the actuator 106 in the ink cartridge can be detected by the change in the frequency or the amplitude of the residual vibration remained after the oscillation of the actuator 106. In Fig. 23(A) and Fig. 23(B), the vertical axis shows the voltage of the counter electromotive force generated by the residual vibration of the actuator 106, and the horizontal axis shows the time. By the residual vibration of the actuator 106, the waveform of the analog signal of the voltage generates as shown in Fig. 23 (A) and Fig. 23 (B). Then, the analog signal is converted to a digital numerical value corresponding to the frequency of the signal.

**[0147]** In the example shown in Fig. 23(A) and Fig. 23(B), the existence of the ink is detected by measuring the time during the generation of the four numbers of pulses from the fourth pulse to the eighth pulse of the analog signal.

**[0148]** In detail, after the actuator 106 oscillates, the number of the times when the analog signal get across the predetermined reference voltage from the low voltage side to the high voltage side. The digital signal is set to be high while the analog signal becomes fourth counts to the eighth counts, and the time during fourth counts to the eighth counts is measured by predetermined clock pulse.

**[0149]** Fig. 23(B) shows the waveform when the ink level is above the level of the mounting position of the actuator 106. Fig. 23(B) shows the waveform when the ink level is below the level of the mounting position of the actuator 106. Comparing the Fig. 23(A) and Fig. 23(B), the time of the Fig. 23(A) during the fourth counts to the eighth counts is longer than the time of the Fig. 23 (B). In other words, depends on the existence of the ink, the time from the fourth counts to the eighth counts is different. By using this difference of the time, the consumption status of the ink can be detected. The reason to count the analog signal from the fourth counts is to start the measurement of the time after the vibration of the actuator 106 becomes stable. It is only one of the example of starting the measurement from fourth counts, but measurement can be started from the desired counts.

**[0150]** The signals from the fourth counts to the eighth counts are detected, and the time from the fourth counts to the eighth counts is measured by the predetermined clock pulse. By this measurement, the resonant frequency can be obtained. The clock pulse is prefer to be a pulse having a same clock with the clock for controlling such as the semiconductor memory device which is mounted on the ink cartridge. It does not necessary to measure the time until the eighth counts, but the time until the desired counts can be measured. In Fig. 23, the time from the fourth counts to the eighth counts is measured, however, the time during the different interval of the counts also can be detected according to the circuit configuration which detects the frequency.

**[0151]** For example, when the ink quality is stable and the fluctuation of the amplitude of the peak is small, the resonant frequency can be detected by detecting the time from the fourth counts to the sixth counts to increase the speed of detection. Moreover, when the ink quality is unstable and the fluctuation of the amplitude of the pulse is large, the time from the fourth counts to the twelfth counts can be detected to detect the residual vibration accurately.

**[0152]** Furthermore, as other embodiments, the wave number of the voltage waveform of the counter electromotive force during the predetermined period can be counted. More specifically, after the actuator 106 oscillates, the digital signal is set to be high during the predetermined period, and the number of the times when the analog signal is get across the predetermined reference voltage from the low voltage side to the high voltage side is counted. By measuring the count number, the existence of the ink can be detected.

**[0153]** Furthermore, it can be known by comparing Fig. 23 (A) with Fig. 23(B), the amplitude of the waveform of the counter electromotive force is different when the ink is filled in the ink cartridge and when the ink is not existed in the ink cartridge. Therefore, the ink consumption status in the ink cartridge can be detected by measuring the amplitude of the waveform of the counter electromotive force without calculating the resonant frequency. More specifically, for example, a reference voltage is set between the peak point of the waveform of the counter electromotive force of the Fig. 23(A) and the peak point of the waveform of the counter electromotive force of the Fig. 23(B). Then, after the actuator 106 oscillates, set the digital signal to be high at the predetermined time. Then, if the waveform of the counter electromotive force get across the reference voltage, it can be judged that there is no ink in the ink cartridge. If the waveform of the counter electromotive force does not get across the reference voltage, it can be judged that there is ink in the ink cartridge.

**[0154]** Fig. 24 shows the manufacturing method of the actuator 106. A plurality of the actuators 106, four numbers in the case of the Fig. 24, are formed as one body. The actuator 106 shown in Fig. 25 is manufactured by cutting the plurality of actuator 106, which is formed in one body as shown in Fig. 24, at each of the actuator 106. If the each of the piezoelectric elements of the each of the plurality of the actuator 106, which is formed in one body as shown in Fig. 24, are circular shape, the actuator 106 shown in Fig. 20 can be manufactured by cutting the actuator 106, which is formed as one body, at each of actuator 106. By forming a plurality of the actuator 106 in one body, a plurality of actuator 106 can be manufactured effectively at the same time, and also the handling during the transportation becomes easy.

**[0155]** The actuator 106 has a thin plate or a vibrating plate 176, a base plate 178, an elastic wave generating device or piezoelectric element 174, a terminal forming member or an upper electrode terminal 168, and a terminal forming member or a lower electrode terminal 170. The piezoelectric element 174 includes a piezoelectric vibrating plate or a piezoelectric layer 160, an upper electrode 164, and a lower electrode 166. The vibrating plate 176 is formed on the top surface of the base plate 178, and the lower electrode 166 is formed on the top surface of the vibrating plate 176. The piezoelectric layer 160 is formed on the top surface of the lower electrode 166, and the upper electrode 164 is formed on the top surface of the piezoelectric layer 160. Therefore, the main portion of the piezoelectric layer 160 is formed by sandwiching the main portion of the piezoelectric layer 160 by the main portion of the upper electrode 164 and the main portion of the lower electrode 166 from top side and from bottom side.

**[0156]** A plurality of the piezoelectric element 174, four numbers in the case of Fig. 24, is formed on the vibrating plate 176. The lower electrode 166 is formed on the top surface of the vibrating plate 176. The piezoelectric layer 160 is formed on the top surface of the lower electrode 166, and the upper electrode 164 is formed on the top surface of the piezoelectric layer 160. The upper electrode terminal 168 and the lower electrode terminal 170 are formed on the end portion of the upper electrode 164 and the lower electrode 166. The four numbers of the actuator 106 are used separately by cutting each of the actuator 106 separately.

**[0157]** Fig. 25 shows a cross-section of a part of the actuator 106 shown in Fig. 25. The through hole 178a is formed on the face of the base plate 178 which faces with the piezoelectric element 174. The through hole 178a is sealed by the vibrating plate 176. The vibrating plate 176 is formed by the material which has electric insulating characteristic such as alumina and zirconium oxide and also possible to be deformed elastically. The piezoelectric element 174 is formed on the vibrating plate 176 to face with the through hole 178a. The lower electrode 166 is formed on the surface of the vibrating plate 176 so as to be extended to the one direction, left direction in Fig. 26, from the region of the through hole 178a. The upper electrode 164 is formed on the surface of the piezoelectric layer 160 so as to be extended to the opposite direction of the lower electrode 166, which is right direction in Fig. 26, from the region of the through hole 178a. Each of the upper electrode terminal 168 and the lower electrode terminal 170 is formed on the surface of the each of supplementary electrode 172 and the lower electrode 166, respectively. The lower electrode terminal

170 with the lower electrode 166 electrically, and the upper electrode terminal 168 contacts with the upper electrode 164 electrically through the supplementary electrode 172 to deliver a signal between the piezoelectric element and the outside of the actuator 106. The upper electrode terminal 168 and the lower electrode terminal 170 has a height higher than the height of the piezoelectric element which is the sum of the height of the electrodes and the piezoelectric layer.

**[0158]** Fig. 27 shows the manufacturing method of the actuator 106 shown in Fig. 24. First, a through hole 940a is formed on a green sheet 940 by perforating the green sheet 940 by a press or laser processing. The green sheet 940 becomes the base plate 178 after the burning process. The green sheet 940 is formed by the material such as ceramic material. Then, a green sheet 941 is laminated on the surface of the green sheet 940. The green sheet 941 becomes the vibrating plate 176 after the burning process. The green sheet 941 is formed by the material such as zirconium oxide. Then, a conductive layer 942, the piezoelectric layer 160, and a conductive layer 944 is formed on the surface of the green sheet 941 sequentially by the method such as printing. The conductive layer 942 becomes the lower electrode 166, and the conductive layer 944 becomes the upper electrode 164 after the burning process. Next, the green sheet 940, the green sheet 941, the conductive layer 942, the piezoelectric layer 160, and the conductive layer 944 are dried and burned. The spacer member 947 and 948 are provided on the green sheet 941 to raising the height of the upper electrode terminal 168 and the lower electrode terminal 170 to be higher than the piezoelectric element. The spacer member 947 and 948 is formed by printing the same material with the green sheet 940 and 941 or by laminating the green sheet on the green sheet 941. By this spacer member 947 and 948, the quantity of the material of the upper electrode terminal 168 and the lower electrode terminal 170, which is a noble metal, can be reduced. Moreover, because the thickness of the upper electrode terminal 168 and the lower electrode terminal 170 can be reduced, the upper electrode terminal 168 and the lower electrode terminal 170 can be accurately printed to be a stable height.

**[0159]** If a connection part 944', which is connected with the conductive layer 944, and the spacer member 947 and 948 are formed at the same time when the conductive layer 942 is formed, the upper electrode terminal 168 and the lower electrode terminal 170 can be easily formed and firmly fixed. Finally, the upper electrode terminal 168 and the lower electrode terminal 170 are formed on the end region of the conductive layer 942 and the conductive layer 944. During the forming of the upper electrode terminal 168 and the lower electrode terminal 170, the upper electrode terminal 168 and the lower electrode terminal 170 are formed to be connected with the piezoelectric layer 160 electrically.

**[0160]** Fig. 28 shows further other embodiment of the ink cartridge of the present invention. Fig. 28(A) is a cross sectional view of the bottom part of the ink cartridge of the present embodiment. The ink cartridge of the present embodiment has a through hole 1c on the bottom face 1a of the container 1, which contains ink. The bottom part of the through hole 1c is closed by the actuator 650 and forms an ink storing part.

**[0161]** Fig. 28(B) shows a detailed cross section of the actuator 650 and the through hole 1c shown in Fig. 28(A). Fig. 28(C) shows a plan view of the actuator 650 and the through hole 1c shown in Fig. 28(2). The actuator 650 has a vibrating plate 72 and a piezoelectric element 73 which is fixed to the vibrating plate 72. The actuator 650 is fixed to the bottom face of the container 1 such that the piezoelectric element 73 can face to the through hole 1c through the vibrating plate 72 and the base plate 72. The vibrating plate 72 can be elastically deformed and is ink resistant.

**[0162]** Amplitude and frequency of the counter electromotive force generated by the residual vibration of the piezoelectric element 73 and the vibrating plate 72 changes with the ink quantity in the container 1. The through hole 1c is formed on the position which is faced to actuator 650, and the minimum constant amount of ink is secured in the through hole 1c. Therefore, the status of the end of ink end can be reliably detected by previously measuring the characteristic of the vibration of the actuator 650, which is determined by the ink quantity secured in the through hole 1c.

**[0163]** Fig. 29 shows other embodiment of the through hole 1c. In each of Fig. 29(A), (B), and (C), the left hand side of the figure shows the status that there is no ink K in the through hole 1c, and the right hand side of the figure shows the status that ink K is remained in the through hole 1c. In the embodiment of Fig. 28, the side face of the through hole 1c is formed as the vertical wall. In Fig. 29(A), the side face 1d of the through hole 1c is slanted in vertical direction and opens with expanding to the outside. In Fig. 29(B), a stepped portion 1e and 1f are formed on the side face of the through hole 1c. The stepped portion 1f, which is provided above the stepped portion 1e, is wider than the stepped portion 1e. In Fig. 29(C), the through hole 1c has a groove 1g that extends to the direction in which ink is easily discharged, that is, the direction to a ink supply port 2.

**[0164]** According to the shape of the through hole 1c shown in Fig. 29 (A) to (C), the quantity of ink K in the ink storing part can be reduced. Therefore, because the M' cav can be smaller than the M'max explained in Fig. 20 and Fig. 21, the vibration characteristic of the actuator 650 at the time of the ink end status can be greatly different with the vibration characteristic when enough quantity of ink K for printing is remained in the container 1, and thus the ink end status can be reliably detected.

**[0165]** Fig. 30 shows a slant view of the other embodiment of the actuator. The actuator 660 has packing 76 on the outside of the base plate, which constitutes the actuator 660, or the through hole 1c of a mounting plate 72. Caulking holes 77 are formed on the outskirts of the actuator 660. The actuator 660 is fixed to the container 1 through the caulking hole 77 with caulking. Fig. 31(A) and (B) is a slant view of the further other embodiment of the actuator. In this embodiment, the actuator 670 comprises a concave part forming base plate 80 and a piezoelectric element 82. The

concave part 81 is formed on the one side of the face of the concave part forming base plate 80 by the technique such as etching, and piezoelectric element 82 is mounted on the other side of the face of the concave part forming base plate 80. The bottom portion of the concave part 81 operates as a vibrating region within the concave part forming base plate 80. Therefore, the vibrating region of the actuator 670 is determined by the periphery of the concave part 81. Furthermore, the actuator 670 has the similar structure with the structure of the actuator 106 shown in Fig. 20, in which the base plate 178 and the vibrating plate 176 is formed as one body. Therefore, the manufacturing process during the manufacturing an ink cartridge can be reduced, and the cost for manufacturing an ink cartridge also can be reduced. The actuator 670 has a size which can be embedded into the through hole 1c provided on the container 1. By this embedding process, the concave part 81 can operate as the cavity. The actuator 106 shown in Fig.20 can be formed to be embedded into through hole 1c as actuator 670 shown in Fig. 31.

**[0166]** Fig. 32 shows a slant view of the configuration that forms the actuator 106 in one body as a mounting module 100. The module 100 is mounted on the predetermined position of the container 1 of an ink cartridge. The module 100 is constituted to detect the ink consumption status in the container 1 by detecting at least the change of acoustic impedance of the ink liquid. The module 100 of the present embodiment has a liquid container mounting member 101 for mounting the actuator 106 to the container 1. The liquid container mounting member 101 has a structure which mounts a cylindrical part 116 that contains the actuator 106 which oscillates by the driving signal on a base mount 102, the plan of which is substantially rectangular. Because the module 100 is constructed so that the actuator 106 of the module 100 can not be contact from outside when the module 100 is mounted on the ink cartridge, the actuator 106 can be protected from outside contact. The top side of the edge of the cylindrical part 116 is chamfered so that the cylindrical part 116 can be easily fit into the hole which is formed in the ink cartridge.

**[0167]** Fig. 33 shows an exploded view of the module 100 shown in Fig. 32 to show the structure of the module 100. The module 100 includes a liquid container mounting member 101 made from a resin and a piezoelectric device mounting member 105 which has a plate 110 and a concave part 113. Furthermore, the module 100 has a lead wire 104a and 104b, actuator 106, and a film 108. Preferably, the plate 110 is made from a material which is difficult to be rust such as stainless or stainless alloy. The opening 114 is formed on the central part of the cylindrical part 116 and the base mount 102 which are included in the liquid container mounting member 101 so that the cylindrical part 116 and the base mount 102 can contain the lead wire 104a and 104b. The concave part 113 is formed on the central part of the cylindrical part 116 and the base mount 102 so that the cylindrical part 116 and the base mount 102 can contain the actuator 106, the film 108, and the plate 110. The actuator 106 is connected to the plate 110 through the film 108, and the plate 110 and the actuator 106 are fixed to the liquid container mounting member 101. Therefore, the lead wire 104a and 104b, the actuator 106, the film 108 and the plate 110 are mounted on the liquid container mounting member 101 as one body. Each of the lead wire 104a and 104b transfer a driving signal to piezoelectric layer by coupling with the upper electrode and the lower electrode 166 of the actuator 106, and also transfer the signal of resonant frequency detected by the actuator 106 to recording apparatus. The actuator 106 oscillates temporally based on the driving signal transferred from the lead wire 104a and 104b. The actuator 106 vibrates residually after the oscillation and generates a counter electromotive force by the residual vibration. By detecting the vibrating period of the waveform of the counter electromotive force, the resonant frequency corresponding to the consumption status of the liquid in the liquid container can be detected. The film 108 bonds the actuator 106 and the plate 110 to seal the actuator 106. The film 108 is preferably formed by such as polyolefin and bonded to the actuator 106 and the plate 110 by heat sealing. By bonding the actuator 106 and the plate 110 with the film 108 face with face, the unevenness of the bonding on location decreases, and thus the portion other than the vibrating plate does not vibrate. Therefore, the change of the resonant frequency before and after bonding the actuator 106 to plate 110 is small.

**[0168]** The plate 110 is circular shape, and the opening 114 of the base mount 102 is formed in cylindrical shape. The actuator 106 and the film 108 are formed in rectangular shape. The lead wire 104, the actuator 106, the film 108, and the plate 110 can be attached to and removed from the base mount 102. Each of the base mount 102, the lead wire 104, the actuator 106, the film 108, and the plate 110 is arranged symmetric with respect to the central axis of the module 100. Furthermore, each of the centers of the base mount 102, the actuator 106, the film 108, and the plate 110 is arranged substantially on the central axis of the module 100.

**[0169]** The opening 114 of the base mount 102 is formed such that the area of the opening 114 is larger than the area of the vibrating region of the actuator 106. The through hole 112 is formed on the center of the plate 110 where the vibrating section of the actuator 106 faces. As shown in Fig. 20 and Fig. 21, the cavity 162 is formed on the actuator 106, and both of the through hole 112 and the cavity 162 forms ink storing part. The thickness of the plate 110 is preferably smaller than diameter of the through hole 112 to reduce the influence of the residual ink. For example, the depth of the through hole 112 is preferably smaller than one third of the diameter of the through hole 112. The shape of the through hole 112 is substantially true circle and symmetric with respect to the central axis of the module 100. Furthermore, the area of the through hole 112 is larger than the area of opening of the cavity 162 of the actuator 106. The periphery of the shape of the cross-section of the through hole 112 can be tapered shape of stepped shape. The module 100 is mounted on the side, top, or bottom of the container 1 such that the through hole 112 faces to the inside of



the container 1. When the ink is consumed, and the ink around the actuator 106 is exhausted, the resonant frequency of the actuator 106 greatly changes. The change of the ink level can thus be detected.

**[0170]** Fig.34 shows the slant view of the other embodiments of the module. The piezoelectric device mounting member 405 is formed on the liquid container mounting member 101 in the module 400 of the present embodiment. The cylindrical part 403, which has a cylindrical shape, is formed on the base mount 102, which has a square shaped plan, the edges of which are rounded, in the liquid container mounting member 401. Furthermore, the piezoelectric apparatus mounting member 405 includes a board shaped element 405, which is set up on the cylindrical part 403, and a concave part 413. The actuator 106 is arranged on the concave part 413 provided on the side face of the board shaped element 406. The top end of the board shaped element 406 is chamfered in predetermined angle so that the board shaped element is easy to fit into hole formed on the ink cartridge when mounting the actuator 106 to ink cartridge.

**[0171]** Fig. 35 shows an exploded view of the module 400 shown in Fig. 34 to show the structure of the module 400. As the module 100 shown in Fig. 32, the module 400 includes a liquid container mounting member 401 and a piezoelectric device mounting member 405. The liquid container mounting member 401 has the base mount 402 and the cylindrical part 403, and the piezoelectric device mounting member 405 has the board shaped element 406 and the concave part 413. The actuator 106 is connected to the plate 410 and fixed to the concave part 413. The module 400 has a lead wire 404a and 404b, actuator 106, and a film 408.

**[0172]** According to the present embodiment, the plate 410 is rectangular shape, and the opening 414 provided on the board shaped element 406 is formed in rectangular shape. The lead wire 404a and 404b, the actuator 106, the film 408, and the plate 410 can be attached to and removed from the base mount 402. Each of the actuator 106, the film 408, and the plate 410 is arranged symmetric with respect to the central axis which is extended to perpendicular direction to the plan of opening 414 and also pass through the center of opening 414. Furthermore, each of the centers of the actuator 106, the film 408, and the plate 410 is arranged substantially on the central axis of the opening 414.

**[0173]** The through hole 412 provided on the center of the plate 410 is formed such that the area of the through hole 412 is larger than the area of the opening of the cavity 162 of the actuator 106. The cavity 162 of the actuator 106 and the through hole 412 together forms ink storing part. The thickness of the plate 410 is preferably smaller than diameter of the through hole 412. For example, the thickness of the plate 410 is smaller than one third of the diameter of the through hole 412. The shape of the through hole 412 is substantially true circle and symmetric with respect to the central axis of the module 400. The shape of the cross-section of the periphery of the through hole 112 can be tapered shape or stepped shape. The module 400 can be mounted on the bottom of the container 1 such that the through hole 412 is arranged inside of the container 1. Because the actuator 106 is arranged inside the container 1 such that the actuator 106 extends in the vertical direction, the setting of the timing of the ink end can be easily changed by changing the height of the mounting position of the actuator 106 in the container 1 by changing the height of the base mount 402.

**[0174]** Fig.36 shows the further other embodiment of the module. As the module 100 shown in Fig. 32, the module 500 of Fig. 36 includes a liquid container mounting member 501 which has a base mount 502 and a cylindrical part 503. Furthermore, the module 500 further has a lead wire 504a and 504b, actuator 106, a film 508, and a plate 510. The opening 514 is formed on the center of the base mount 502, which is included in the liquid container mounting member 501, so that the base mount 502 can contain the lead wire 504a and 504b. The concave part 513 is formed on the cylindrical part 503 so that the cylindrical part 503 can contain the actuator 106, the film 508, and the plate 510. The actuator 106 is fixed to the piezoelectric device mounting member 505 through the plate 510. Therefore, the lead wire 504a and 504b, the actuator 106, the film 508, and the plate 510 are mounted on the liquid container mounting member 501 as one body. The cylindrical part 503, the top face of which is slanted in vertical direction, is formed on the base mount which has a square shaped plan and the edges of which are rounded. The actuator 106 is arranged on the concave part 513 which is provided on the top surface of the cylindrical part 503 that is slanted in vertical direction.

**[0175]** The top end of the module 500 is slanted, and the actuator 106 is mounted on this slanted surface. Therefore, if the module 500 is mounted on the bottom or the side of the container 1, the actuator 106 slants in the vertical direction of the container 1. The slanting angle of the top end of the module 500 is substantially between 30 degree and 60 degree with considering the detecting performance.

**[0176]** The module 500 is mounted on the bottom or the side of the container 1 so that the actuator 106 can be arranged inside the container 1. When the module 500 is mounted on the side of the container 1, the actuator 106 is mounted on the container 1 such that the actuator 106 faces the upside, downside, or side of the container 1 with slanting. When the module 500 is mounted on the bottom of the container 1, the actuator 106 is preferable to be mounted on the container 1 such that the actuator 106 faces to the ink supply port side of the container 1 with slanting.

**[0177]** Fig. 37 shows a cross-sectional view around the bottom of the container 1 when the module 100 shown in Fig. 32 is mounted on the container 1. The module 100 is mounted on the container 1 so that the module 100 penetrates through the side wall of the container 1. The O-ring 365 is provided on the connection face of between the side wall of the container 1 and the module 100 to seal between the module 100 and the container 1. The module 100 is preferable to include the cylindrical part as explained in Fig. 32 so that the module 100 can be sealed by the O-ring. By inserting

the top end of the module 100 inside the container 1, ink in the container 1 contacts with the actuator 106 through the through hole 112 of the plate 110. Because the resonant frequency of the residual vibration of the actuator 106 is different depends on whether the circumference of the vibrating section of the actuator 106 is liquid or gas, the ink consumption status can be detected using the module 100. Furthermore, not only the module 100 can be mounted on the container 1 and detect the existence of ink, but also the module 400 shown in Fig. 34, module 500 shown in Fig. 36, or the module 700A and 700B shown in Fig. 38, and a mold structure 600 can be mounted on the container 1 and detect the existence of the ink.

**[0178]** Fig. 38(A) shows the cross section of the ink container when mounting module 700B on the container 1. The present embodiment uses a module 700B as an example of a mounting structure.

**[0179]** The actuator 106 includes the piezoelectric layer 160, the upper electrode 164, the lower electrode 166, the vibrating plate 176, and the mounting plate 350. The vibrating plate 176 is formed on the mounting plate 350, and the lower electrode 166 is formed on the vibrating plate 176. The piezoelectric layer 160 is formed on the top face of the lower electrode 166, and the upper electrode 164 is formed on the top face of the piezoelectric layer 160. Therefore, the main portion of the piezoelectric layer 160 is formed by sandwiching the main portion of the piezoelectric layer 160 by the main portion of the upper electrode 164 and the lower electrode 166 from top and bottom. The circular portion, which is a main portion of each of the piezoelectric layer 160, the upper electrode 164, and the lower electrode 166, forms a piezoelectric element. The piezoelectric element is formed on the vibrating plate 176. The vibrating region of the piezoelectric element and the vibrating plate 176 constitutes the vibrating section, on which the actuator 106 actuates.

**[0180]** The module 700B is mounted on the container 1 such that the liquid container mounting member 360 protrude into the inside of the A through hole 370 is formed in the mounting plate 350, and the through hole 370 faces to the vibrating section of the actuator 106. Furthermore, a hole 382 is formed on the bottom wall of the module 700B, and a piezoelectric device mounting member 363 is formed. The actuator 106 is arranged to close the one of the face of the hole 382. Therefore, ink contacts with the vibrating plate 176 through the hole 382 of the piezoelectric device mounting member 363 and the through hole 370 of the mounting plate 350. The hole 382 of the piezoelectric device mounting member 363 and the through hole 370 of the mounting plate 350 together forms an ink storing part. The piezoelectric device mounting member 363 and the actuator 106 are fixed by the mounting plate 350 and the film material. The sealing structure 372 is provided on the connection part of the liquid container mounting member 360 and the container 1. The sealing structure 372 can be formed by the plastic material such as synthetic resin or O-ring. In Fig. 38(A), the module 700B and the container 1 is separate body, however, the piezoelectric device mounting member can be constituted by a part of the container 1 as shown in Fig. 38(B).

**[0181]** There is possibility that the actuator 106 malfunctions by the contact of the ink which is dropped from a top face or a side face of the container 1 with the actuator 106, the ink of which is attached to the top face or the side face of the container 1 when the ink cartridge is shaken. However, because the liquid container mounting member 360 of the module 700B protrudes into the inside of the container 1, the actuator 106 does not malfunction by the ink dropped from the top face or the side face of the container 1.

**[0182]** Fig. 38(B) shows the cross section of the ink container when mounting actuator 106 on the container 1. A protecting member 361 is mounted on the container 1 separately with the actuator 106 in the ink cartridge of the embodiment shown in Fig. 38(B). Therefore, the protecting member 361 and the actuator 106 is not one body as a module, and the protecting member 361 thus can protect the actuator 106 not to be contact by the user. A hole 380 which is provide on the front face of the actuator 106 is arranged on the side wall of the container 1. A through hole 370 is provided on the mounting plate 350. Furthermore, a hole 380 is formed on the side wall of the container 1. Therefore, ink contacts with the vibrating plate 176 through the hole 380 of the container 1 and the through hole 370 of the mounting plate 350. The hole 380 of the container land the through hole 370 of the mounting plate 350 together forms ink storing part. Moreover, because the actuator 106 is protected by the protecting member 361, the actuator 106 can be protected from the outside contact. The base plate 178 shown in Fig. 20 can be used instead of the mounting plate 350 in the embodiment shown in Fig. 38(A) and (B).

**[0183]** Fig. 38(C) shows an embodiment that comprises a mold structure 600 which includes the actuator 106. In the present embodiment, a mold structure 600 is used as one example of the mounting structure. The mold structure 600 has the actuator 106 and a mold member 364. The actuator 106 and the mold member 364 are formed in one body. The mold member 364 is formed by a plastic material such as silicon resin. The mold member 364 includes a lead wire 362 in its inside. The mold member 364 is formed so that the mold member 364 has two legs extended from the actuator 106. The end of the two legs of the mold member 364 are formed in a shape of hemisphere to liquid tightly fix the mold member 364 with container 1. The mold member 364 is mounted on the container 1 such that the actuator 106 protrudes into the inside of the container 1, and the vibrating section of the actuator 106 contacts with ink inside the container 1. The upper electrode 164, the piezoelectric layer 160, and the lower electrode 166 of the actuator 106 are protected from ink by the mold member 364.

**[0184]** Because the mold structure 600 shown in Fig. 38 does not need the sealing structure 372 between the mold



member 364 and the container 1, the leaking of ink from the container 1 can be reduced. Moreover, because the mold structure 600 has a form that the mold structure 600 does not protrude from the outside of the container 1, the mold structure 600 can protect the actuator 106 from the outside contact. There is possibility that the actuator 106 malfunctions by the contact of the ink which is dropped from a top face or a side face of the container 1 with the actuator 106, the ink of which is attached to the top face or the side face of the container 1 when the ink cartridge is shaken. Because the mold member 364 of the mold structure 600 protrudes into the inside of the container 1, the actuator 106 does not malfunction by the ink dropped from the top face or the side face of the container 1.

**[0185]** Fig. 39 shows an embodiment of an ink cartridge and an ink jet recording apparatus which uses the actuator 106 shown in Fig. 20. A plurality of ink cartridges 180 is mounted on the ink jet recording apparatus which has a plurality of ink introducing members 182 and a holder 184 each corresponding to the each of ink cartridge 180, respectively. Each of the plurality of ink cartridges 180 contains different types of ink, for example, different color of ink. The actuator 106, which detects at least acoustic impedance, is mounted on the each of bottom of the plurality of ink cartridge 180. The residual quantity of ink in the ink cartridge 180 can be detected by mounting the actuator 106 on the ink cartridge 180.

**[0186]** Fig. 40 shows a detail around the head member of the ink jet recording apparatus. The ink jet recording apparatus has an ink introducing member 182, a holder 184, a head plate 186, and a nozzle plate 188. A plurality of nozzle 190, which jet out ink, is formed on the nozzle plate 188. The ink introducing member 182 has an air supply hole 181 and an ink introducing inlet 183. The air supply hole 181 supplies air to the ink cartridge 180. The ink introducing inlet 183 introduces ink from the ink cartridge 180. The ink cartridge 180 has an air introducing inlet 185 and an ink supply port 187. The air introducing inlet 185 introduces air from the air supply hole 181 of the ink introducing member 182. The ink supply port 187 supplies ink to the ink introducing inlet 183 of the ink introducing member 182. By introducing air from the ink introducing member 182 to the ink cartridge 180, the ink cartridge 180 accelerates the supply of ink from the ink cartridge 180 to the ink introducing member 182. The holder 184 communicates ink supplied from the ink cartridge 180 through the ink introducing member 182 to the head plate 186.

**[0187]** Fig. 41 shows other embodiment of the ink cartridge 180 shown in Fig. 40. The actuator 106 is mounted on the bottom face 194a, which is formed to be slanted in vertical direction, of the ink cartridge 180A shown in the Fig. 41(A). A wave preventing wall 192 is provided on the position where has the predetermined height from the bottom face of the inside the ink container 194 and also faces to the actuator 106 inside the ink container 194 of the ink cartridge 180. Because the actuator 106 is mounted on the ink container 194 slanted in vertical direction, the drainage of ink can be improved.

**[0188]** A gap, which is filled with ink, is formed between the actuator 106 and the wave preventing wall 192. The space between the wave preventing wall 192 and the actuator 106 has a space such that the space does not hold ink by capillary force. When the ink container 194 is rolled, ink wave is generated inside the ink container 194 by the rolling, and there is possibility that the actuator 106 malfunctions by detecting gas or an air bubble caused by the shock of the ink wave. By providing the wave preventing wall 192, ink wave around the actuator 106 can be prevented so that the malfunction of the actuator 106 can be prevented.

**[0189]** The actuator 106 of the ink cartridge 180B shown in Fig. 41 is mounted on the side wall of the supply port of the ink container 194. The actuator 106 can be mounted on the side wall or bottom face of the ink container 194 if the actuator 106 is mounted nearby the ink supply port 187. The actuator 106 is preferably mounted on the center of the width direction of the ink container 194. Because ink is supplied to the outside through the ink supply port 187, ink and actuator 106 reliably contacts until the timing of the ink near end by providing the actuator 106 nearby the ink supply port 187. Therefore, the actuator 106 can reliably detect the timing of the ink near end.

**[0190]** Furthermore, by providing the actuator 106 nearby the ink supply port 187, the setting position of the actuator 106 to the connection point on the carriage on the ink container becomes reliable during the mounting of the ink container on the cartridge holder of the carriage. It is because the reliability of coupling between the ink supply port with the ink supply needle is most important during the coupling of the ink container and the carriage. If there is even a small gap, the tip of the ink supply needle will be hurt or a sealing structure such as O-ring will be damaged so that the ink will be leaked. To prevent this kind of problems, the ink jet printer usually has a special structure that can accurately positioning the ink container during the mounting of the ink container on the carriage. Therefore, the positioning of the actuator 106 becomes reliable by arranging the actuator nearby the ink supply port. Furthermore, the actuator 106 can be further reliably positioned by mounting the actuator 106 at the center of the width direction of the ink container 194. It is because the rolling is the smallest when the ink container rolls along an axis, the center of which is center line of the width direction, during the mounting of the ink container on the holder.

**[0191]** Fig. 42 shows further other embodiment of the ink cartridge 180. Fig. 42(A) shows a cross section of an ink cartridge 180C, and Fig. 42 (B) shows a cross section which enlarges the side wall 194b of an ink cartridge 180C shown in Fig. 42 (A). Fig. 42 (C) shows perspective view from the front of the side wall 194b of the ink cartridge 180C. The semiconductor memory device 7 and the actuator 106 are formed on the same circuit board 610 in the ink cartridge 180C. As shown in Fig. 42(B) and (C), the semiconductor memory device 7 is formed on the upper side of the circuit

board 610, and the actuator 106 is formed on the lower side of the semiconductor memory device 7 on the same circuit board 610. A different-type O-ring 614 is mounted on the side wall 194b such that the different-type O-ring 614 surrounds the actuator 106. A plurality of caulking part 616 is formed on the side wall 194b to couple the circuit board 610 with the ink container 194. By coupling the circuit board 610 with the ink container 194 using the caulking part 616 and pushing the different-type O-ring 614 to the circuit board 610, the vibrating region of the actuator 106 can contacts with ink, and at the same time, the inside of the ink cartridge is sealed from outside of the ink cartridge.

**[0192]** A terminals 612 are formed on the semiconductor memory device 7 and around the semiconductor memory device 7. The terminal 612 transfer the signal between the semiconductor memory device 7 and outside the ink jet recording apparatus. The semiconductor memory device 7 can be constituted by the semiconductor memory which can be rewritten such as EEPROM. Because the semiconductor memory device 7 and the actuator 106 are formed on the same circuit board 610, the mounting process can be finished at one time during mounting the semiconductor memory device 7 and the actuator 106 on the ink cartridge 180C. Moreover, the working process during the manufacturing of the ink cartridge 180C and the recycling of the ink cartridge 180C can be simplified. Furthermore, the manufacturing cost of the ink cartridge 180C can be reduced because the numbers of the parts can be reduced.

**[0193]** The actuator 106 detects the ink consumption status inside the ink container 194. The semiconductor memory device 7 stores the information of ink such as residual quantity of ink detected by the actuator 106. That is, the semiconductor memory device 7 stores the information related to the characteristic parameter such as the characteristic of ink and the ink cartridge used for the actuator 106 when detecting the ink consumption status. The semiconductor memory device 7 previously stores the resonant frequency of when ink inside the ink container 194 is full, that is, when ink is filled in the ink container 194 sufficiently, or when ink in the ink container 194 is end, that is, ink in the ink container 194 is consumed, as one of the characteristic parameter. The resonant frequency when the ink inside the ink container 194 is full status or end status can be stored when the ink container is mounted on the ink jet recording apparatus for the first time. Moreover, the resonant frequency when the ink inside the ink container 194 is full status or end status can be stored during the manufacturing of the ink container 194. Because the unevenness of the detection of the residual quantity of ink can be compensated by storing the resonant frequency when the ink inside the ink container 194 is full status or end status in the semiconductor memory device 7 previously and reading out the data of the resonant frequency at the ink jet recording apparatus side, it can be accurately detected that the residual quantity of ink is decreased to the reference value.

**[0194]** Fig. 43 shows further other embodiment of the ink cartridge 180. A plurality of actuators 106 is mounted on the side wall 194b of the ink container 194 in the ink cartridge 180D shown in Fig. 43(A). It is preferable to use the plurality of the actuators 106 which is formed in one body as shown in Fig. 24 for these plurality of actuators 106. The plurality of actuators 106 is arranged on the side wall 194b with interval in vertical direction. By arranging the plurality of actuators 106 on the side wall 194b with interval in vertical direction, the residual quantity of ink can be detected step by step.

**[0195]** The ink cartridge 180E shown in Fig. 43(B) mounts a actuator 606 which is long in vertical direction on the side wall 194b of the ink container 194. The change of the residual quantity of ink inside the ink container 194 can be detected continuously by the actuator 606 which is long in vertical direction. The length of the actuator 606 is preferably longer than the half of the height of the side wall 194b. In Fig. 43 (B), the actuator 606 has the length from the substantially from the top end to the bottom end of the side wall 194b.

**[0196]** The ink cartridge 180F shown in Fig. 43(C) mounts a plurality of actuators 106 on the side wall 194b of the ink container 194 as the ink cartridge 180D shown in Fig. 43(A). The ink cartridge 180E further comprises the wave preventing wall 192, which is long in vertical direction, along the sidewall 194b with predetermined space with the side wall 194b such that the wave preventing wall 192 faces directly to the plurality of actuators 106. It is preferable to use the plurality of the actuators 106 which is formed in one body as shown in Fig. 24 for these plurality of actuators 106. A gap which is filled with ink is formed between the actuator 106 and the wave preventing wall 192. Moreover, the gap between the wave preventing wall 192 and the actuator 106 has a space such that the gap does not hold ink by capillary force. When the ink container 194 is rolled, ink wave is generated inside the ink container 194 by the rolling, and there is possibility that the actuator 106 malfunctions by detecting gas or an air bubble caused by the shock of the ink wave. By providing the wave preventing wall 192, ink wave around the actuator 106 can be prevented so that the malfunction of the actuator 106 can be prevented. The wave preventing wall 192 also prevents the air bubble generated by the rolling of ink to enter to the actuator 106.

**[0197]** Fig. 45 shows further other embodiment of the ink cartridge 180. The ink cartridge 180G shown in Fig. 45(A) has a plurality of partition walls 212, each of which extends downward from the top face 194c of the ink container 194. Because each of lower end of the partition walls 212 and the bottom face of the ink container 194 has a predetermined gap, the bottom part of the ink container 194 communicates with each other. The ink cartridge 180G has a plurality of containing chambers 213 divided by the each of plurality of partition walls 212. The bottom part of the plurality of the containing chambers 213 communicates with each other. In each of the plurality of the containing chamber 213, the actuator 106 is mounted on the top face 194c of the ink container 194. It is preferable to use the plurality of the actuators

106 which is formed in one body as shown in Fig. 24 for these plurality of actuators 106. The actuator 106 is arranged on substantially center of the top face 194c of the containing chamber 213 of the ink container 194. The volume of the containing chamber 213 is arranged such that the volume of the containing chamber 213 of the ink supply port 187 is the largest, and the volume of the containing chamber 213 gradually decreases as the distance from the ink supply port 187 increases to the inner part of the ink cartridge 180G.

[0198] Therefore, the space between each of the actuator 106 is widest at the ink supply port 187 side and becomes narrower as the distance from the ink supply port 187 increases to the inner part of the ink cartridge 180G. Because ink is drained from the ink supply port 187, and air enters from the air introducing inlet 185, ink is consumed from the containing chamber 213 of the ink supply port 187 side to the containing chamber 213 of the inner part of the ink cartridge 180G. For example, the ink in the containing chamber 213 which is most near to the ink supply port 187 is consumed, and during the ink level of the containing chamber 213 which is most near to the ink supply port 187 decreases, the other containing chamber 213 are filled with ink. When the ink in the containing chamber 213 which is most near to the ink supply port 187 is consumed totally, air enters to the containing chamber 213 which is second by counted from the ink supply port 187, then the ink in the second containing chamber 213 is beginning to be consumed so that the ink level of the second containing chamber 213 begin to decrease. At this time, ink is filled in the containing chamber 213 which is third or more than third by counted from the ink supply port 187. In this way, ink is consumed from the containing chamber 213 which is most near to the ink supply port 187 to the containing chamber 213 which is far from the ink supply port 187 in order.

[0199] As shown above, because the actuator 106 is arranged on the top face 194c of the ink container 194 with interval for each of the containing chamber 213, the actuator 106 can detect the decrease of the ink quantity step by step. Furthermore, because the volume of the containing chamber 213 decreases from the ink supply port 187 to the inner part of the containing chamber 213 gradually, the time interval when the actuator 106 detects the decrease of the ink quantity gradually decreases. Therefore, the frequency of the ink quantity detection can be increased as the ink end is drawing near.

[0200] The ink cartridge 180H shown in Fig. 44(B) has one partition wall 212 which extends downward from the top face 194c of the ink container 194. Because lower end of the partition walls 212 and the bottom face of the ink container 194 have a predetermined space, the bottom part of the ink container 194 communicates with each other. The ink cartridge 180H has two containing chambers 213a and 213b divided by the partition wall 212. The bottom part of the containing chambers 213a and 213b communicates with each other. The volume of the containing chamber 213a of the ink supply port 187 side is larger than the volume of the containing chamber 213b which is located in a inner part of the ink cartridge 180H far from the ink supply port 187. The volume of the containing chamber 213b is preferably smaller than the half of the volume of the containing chamber 213a.

[0201] The actuator 106 is mounted on the top face 194c of the containing chamber 213B. Furthermore, a buffer 214, that is a groove for catching the air bubble which enters to the ink cartridge 180H during manufacturing of the ink cartridge 180H, is formed on the containing chamber 213b. In Fig. 44(B), the buffer 214 is formed as a groove extended upward from the side wall 194b of the ink container 194. Because the buffer 214 catches the air bubble enters inside the containing chamber 213b, the malfunction of the actuator 106 by detecting an ink end when catching the air bubble can be prevented. Furthermore, by providing actuator 106 on the top face 194c of the containing chamber 213b, ink can be completely consumed by compensating the ink quantity, which is measured from the detection of the ink end until the complete consumption of ink, with the corresponding ink consumption status of the containing chamber 213a calculated from the dot counter. Furthermore, by adjusting the volume of the containing chamber 213b by changing the length or the interval of the partition wall 212, the ink quantity which can be consumed after the detection of the ink end can be changed.

[0202] The ink cartridge 180I shown in Fig. 44(C) fills a porous member 216 in the containing chamber 213b of the ink cartridge 180H shown in Fig. 44(B). The porous member 216 is filled inside the containing chamber 213b from the top face to the bottom face of the porous member 216b. The porous member 216 contacts with the actuator 106. There is a possibility that the actuator 106 malfunctions by the entering of the air bubble inside the containing chamber 213b when the ink container fall down or when the containing chamber 213b moves back and forth with the carriage. If the porous member 216 is provided on the containing chamber 213b, the porous member 216 captures air to prevent entering of air into the actuator 106. Furthermore, because the porous member 216 holds ink, the porous member 216 can prevent the actuator 106 to malfunction as detecting the ink end status as ink exist status which is caused by attaching of the ink on the actuator 106 when the ink container shakes. The porous member 216 is preferable to be provided in the containing chamber 213 having a smallest volume. Furthermore, by providing actuator 106 on the top face 194c of the containing chamber 213b, ink can be consumed to the end by compensating the ink quantity which is measured from the detection of the ink end until the complete consumption of ink. Furthermore, The ink quantity which can be consumed after the detection of the ink near end can be changed by adjusting the volume of the containing chamber 213b by changing the length and interval of the partition wall 212.

[0203] Fig. 44(D) shows an ink cartridge 180J, the porous member 216 of which is constituted by two kinds of

porous members 216A and 216B having a different hole diameter with each other. The porous member 216A is located on the upper side of the porous member 216B. The hole diameter of the porous member 216A which is located on the upper side of the containing chamber 213b is larger than the hole diameter of the porous member 216B which is located on the lower side of the containing chamber 213B. The porous member 216A can be formed by the member which has a lower affinity for liquid than the affinity for liquid of the member which forms the porous member 216B. Because the capillary force of the porous member 216B, which has small hole diameter, is larger than the capillary force of the porous member 216A, which has large hole diameter, the ink in the containing chamber 213b is collected to the porous member 216B located on the lower side of the containing chamber 213B and held by the porous member 216B. Therefore, once the air reaches to the actuator 106, and the actuator 106 detects the non-ink status, ink does not reach to the actuator 106 again so that the actuator 106 does not malfunction to detect the ink exist status. Furthermore, because the porous member 216B which is far from the actuator 106 absorbs ink, the drainage of ink around the actuator 106 improves, and the quantity of change of the acoustic impedance during the detection of the ink existence increases. Moreover, by providing the actuator 106 on the top face 194c of the containing chamber 213b, ink can be consumed to the end by compensating the ink quantity which is measured from the detection of the ink near end until the complete consumption of ink. Furthermore, The ink quantity which can be consumed after the detection of the ink near end can be changed by adjusting the volume of the containing chamber 213b by changing the length and interval of the partition wall 212.

**[0204]** Fig. 45 shows a cross section of an ink cartridge 180K which is further other embodiment of the ink cartridge 180I shown in Fig. 44(C). The porous member 216 in the ink cartridge 180K shown in Fig. 45 is designed such that the area of the cross section on the horizontal plane of the lower part of the porous member 216 is compressed to be decreases gradually to the direction to the bottom face of the ink container 194. Therefore, the hole diameter of the porous member 216 decreases gradually to the direction to the bottom face of the ink container 194. Ink cartridge 180K shown in Fig. 45(A) has a rib which is provided on the side wall of the ink container 194 to compress the lower part of the porous member 216 to reduce the hole diameter of the lower part of the porous member 216. Because the hole diameter of the lower part of the porous member 216 reduced by the compression, ink is collected and held by the lower part of the porous member 216. Because the lower part of the porous member 216 which is far from the actuator 106 absorbs ink, the drainage of ink around the actuator 106 improves, and the quantity of change of the acoustic impedance during the detection of the ink existence increases. Therefore, the error, of which the actuator 106 detects the non ink status as the ink exist status by the attaching of ink on the actuator 106 mounted on the top face of the ink cartridge 180K by rolling of ink, can be prevented

**[0205]** In the ink cartridge 180L shown in Fig. 45(B) and Fig. 45(C), to compress to decrease the area of the cross section on the horizontal plane of the lower part of the porous member 216 gradually to the direction to the bottom face of the ink container 194, the area of the cross section on the horizontal plane of the containing chamber gradually decreases to the direction to the bottom face of the ink container 194. Because the hole diameter of the lower part of the porous member 216 reduced by the compression, ink is collected and held by the lower part of the porous member 216. Because the lower part of the porous member 216B which is far from the actuator 106 absorbs ink, the drainage of ink around the actuator 106 improves, and the quantity of change of the acoustic impedance during the detection of the ink existence increases. Therefore, the error, of which the actuator 106 detects the non ink status as the ink exist status by the attaching of ink on the actuator 106 mounted on the top face of the ink cartridge 180L by rolling of ink, can be prevented

**[0206]** Fig. 46 shows other embodiment of the ink cartridge using the actuator 106. The ink cartridge 220A shown in Fig. 46(A) has a first partition wall 222 provided such that it extends downward from the top face of the ink cartridge 220A. Because there is a predetermined space between the lower end of the first partition wall 222 and the bottom face of the ink cartridge 220A, ink can flows into the ink supply port 230 through the bottom face of the ink cartridge 220A. A second partition wall 224 is formed such that the second partition wall 224 extends upward from the bottom face of the ink cartridge 220A on the more ink supply port 230 side of the first partition wall 222. Because there is a predetermined space between the upper end of the second partition wall 224 and the top face of the ink cartridge 220A, ink can flows into the ink supply port 230 through the top face of the ink cartridge 220A.

**[0207]** A first containing chamber 225a is formed on the inner part of the first partition wall 222, seen from the ink supply port 230, by the first partition wall 222. On the other hand, a second containing chamber 225b is formed on the front side of the second partition wall 224, seen from the ink supply port 230, by the second partition wall 224. The volume of the first containing chamber 225a is larger than the volume of the second containing chamber 225b. A capillary passage 227 is formed by providing a space, which can generate the capillary phenomenon, between the first partition wall 222 and the second partition wall 224. Therefore, the ink in the first containing chamber 225a is collected to the capillary passage 227 by the capillary force of the capillary passage 227. Therefore, the capillary passage 227 can prevent that the air or air bubble enters into the second containing chamber 225b. Furthermore, the ink level in the second containing chamber 225b can decrease steadily and gradually. Because the first containing chamber 225a is formed at more inner part of the second containing chamber 225b, seen from the ink supply port 230, the ink in the second con-

taining chamber 225b is consumed after the ink in the first containing chamber 225a is consumed.

[0208] The actuator 106 is mounted on the side wall of the ink cartridge 220A of the ink supply port 230 side, that is, the side wall of the second containing chamber 225b of the ink supply port 230 side. The actuator 106 detects the ink consumption status inside the second containing chamber 225b. The residual quantity of ink at the timing closed to the ink near end can be detected stably by mounting the actuator 106 on the side wall of the second containing chamber 225b. Furthermore, by changing the height of the mounting position of the actuator 106 on the side wall of the second containing chamber 225b, the timing to determine which ink residual quantity as an ink end can be freely set. Because ink is sullied from the first containing chamber 225a to the second containing chamber 225b by the capillary passage 227, the actuator 106 does not influenced by the rolling of ink caused by the rolling of the ink cartridge 220A, and actuator 106 can thus reliably measure the ink residual quantity. Furthermore, because the capillary passage 227 holds ink, the capillary passage 227 can prevent ink to flow backward from the second containing chamber 225b to the first containing chamber 225a.

[0209] A check valve 228 is provided on the top face of the ink cartridge 220A. The leaking of ink outside of the ink cartridge 220A caused by the rolling of the ink cartridge 220A can be prevented by the check valve 228. Furthermore, the evaporation of ink from the ink cartridge 220A can be prevented by providing the check valve 228 on the top face of the ink cartridge 220A. If ink in the ink cartridge 220A is consumed, and negative pressure inside the ink cartridge 220A exceeds the pressure of the check valve 228, the check valve 228 opens and introduces air into the ink cartridge 220A. Then the check valve 228 closes to maintain the pressure inside the ink cartridge 220A to be stable.

[0210] Fig. 46(C) and (D) shows a detailed cross-section of the check valve 228. The check valve 228 shown in Fig. 46(C) has a valve 232 which includes flange 232a formed by rubber. An airhole 233, which communicates air between inside and outside of the ink cartridge 220, is provided on the ink cartridge 220 such that the airhole 233 faces to the flange 232a. The airhole 233 is opened and closed by the flange 232a. The checkvalve 228 opens the flange 232a inward the ink cartridge 220 when the negative pressure in the ink cartridge 220 exceeds the pressure of the check valve 228 by the decrease of ink inside the ink cartridge 220A, and thus the air outside the ink cartridge 220 is introduced into the ink cartridge 220. The check valve 228 shown in Fig. 46(D) has a valve 232 formed by rubber and a spring 235. If the negative pressure inside the ink cartridge 220 exceeds the pressure of the check valve 228, the valve 232 presses and opens the spring 235 to introduce the outside air into the ink cartridge 220 and then closes to maintain the negative pressure inside the ink cartridge 220 to be stable.

[0211] The ink cartridge 220B shown in Fig. 46(B) has a porous member 242 in the first containing chamber 225a instead of providing the check valve 228 on the ink cartridge 220A as shown in Fig. 46. The porous member 242 holds the ink inside the ink cartridge 220B and also prevents ink to be leaked outside of the ink cartridge 220B during the rolling of the ink cartridge 220B.

[0212] The embodiment that the actuator 106 is mounted on an ink cartridge or a carriage, in which the ink cartridge is a separate body with the carriage and mounted on the carriage, has been explained above. However, the actuator 106 can be mounted on the ink tank which is mounted on the ink jet recording apparatus together with a carriage and formed together with a carriage as one body. Furthermore, the actuator 106 can be mounted on the ink tank of the off-carriage type. The off-carriage type ink tank is a separate body with a carriage and supplies ink to carriage through such as tube. Moreover, the actuator of the present embodiment can be mounted on the ink cartridge 180 constituted so that a recording head and an ink container are formed as on body and possible to be exchanged. Liquid sensor and memory means (consumption data memory)

[0213] Description has been made concerning various ink cartridges having ink consumption detecting capability according to the present embodiments. These ink cartridges comprise the liquid sensor (actuator and so on) and the memory means such as a semiconductor memory means. As a result of features of the present embodiment, functions and advantageous aspects realized by combinations of theses structures thereof will be described below.

[0214] Referring to Fig. 47, an ink cartridge 800 corresponds to, for example, the cartridge shown in Fig. 1. The ink cartridge 800 includes a liquid sensor 802 and a consumption data memory 804. The liquid sensor 802 is comprised of the above described elastic wave generating means or actuator, and outputs a signal corresponding to the ink consumption state. The consumption data memory is a mode of the memory means for use with the liquid container according to the present invention. The consumption data memory 804 is a rewritable memory such as an EEPROM and corresponds to the above described semiconductor memory means (Fig. 1, the reference numeral 7).

[0215] A recording device control unit 810 is comprised of a computer which controls the ink-jet recording apparatus. The recording device control unit 810 includes a consumption detecting process unit 812. An ink consumption detecting device comprises the consumption detecting process unit 812, the liquid sensor 802 and the consumption data memory 804. The consumption detecting process unit 812 detects the consumption state by controlling the liquid sensor 802, and writes consumption related data to the consumption data memory 804, and furthermore reads the consumption related data out of the consumption data memory 804.

[0216] The recording device control unit 810 further comprises a consumption data indicating unit 814 and a print operation control unit 816. The consumption data indicating unit 814 indicates to a user the consumption state data

detected by the consumption detecting process unit 812 via a display 818 and a speaker 820. A diagram and the like which indicate an ink remaining amount are displayed in the display 818, and informative sound or composite sound indicating the ink remaining amount are output from the speaker 820. A proper operation may be advised by the composite sound.

**[0217]** The print operation control unit 816 controls a print operation unit 822 based on the consumption state data detected by the consumption detecting process unit 812. The print operation unit 822 includes a print head, a head moving device, a paper feeding device and so on. For example, the consumption detecting process unit 812 instructs the print operation unit 822 to stop the printing operation when it is judged that the ink remaining amount is none.

**[0218]** The recording device control unit 810 may further control other elements based on the detected consumption state. For example, there may be provided an ink replenishing device and an ink cartridge replacement device and so on which are to be controlled by the recording device control unit 810.

**[0219]** Next, the consumption data memory 804 will be described in detail. The consumption data memory 804 stores the consumption related data which relate to the consumption state detected using the liquid sensor 802. The consumption related data include the detected consumption state data. The consumption state data are stored in a consumption state data storing unit 806 of the consumption data memory 804.

**[0220]** Moreover, detection of whether or not the liquid surface has passed can be realized by the liquid sensor 802 on the basis of, for example, the change in the above-described residual vibration state. The residual vibration state corresponds to the acoustic impedance. Whether or not the liquid surface has passed may be detected by the above-described reflected wave of the elastic wave.

**[0221]** Moreover, the consumption related data includes detection characteristic data. The detection characteristic data are the data used for obtaining the consumption state by use of the liquid sensor. In the present embodiment, the detection characteristic data are characteristics to be detected according to the liquid consumption state. The detection characteristic data are the data, for example, on the resonant frequency which represents a magnitude of the acoustic impedance. In this embodiment, detection characteristic data prior to consumption and detection characteristic data after consumption are stored as the detection characteristic data. The detection characteristic data prior to consumption indicates the detection characteristic before the ink is consumed, that is, the detection characteristic in an ink-full state. The detection characteristic data after consumption indicates the detection characteristic expected at the time when the ink has been consumed up to a predetermined detection target, and specifically indicates the detection characteristic when the ink liquid level is below the liquid sensor 802.

**[0222]** The consumption detecting process unit 812 reads out the detection characteristic data, and the ink consumption state is detected based on this detection characteristic data utilizing the liquid sensor 802. When there is obtained a detection signal corresponding to the detection characteristic prior to consumption, it seems that the ink consumption has not progressed and the ink remaining amount is quite a bit. At least, it can be known without fail that the ink liquid surface is above the liquid sensor 802. On the other hand, when there is obtained a detection signal corresponding to the detection characteristic, the ink consumption has progressed and the ink remaining amount is low. The ink liquid surface is below the liquid sensor 802.

**[0223]** An advantageous aspect will be described in which the detection characteristic data are stored in the consumption data memory 804. The detection characteristic is determined by a shape of the ink cartridge, the specifications of the liquid sensor and the specification of ink and other various factors. A change in a design such as a modification thereto may change the detection characteristic. It is not easy to cope with the change of the detection characteristic when the consumption detecting process unit 812 always uses the same detection characteristic data. On the other hand, in the present embodiment, the detection characteristic data are stored in the consumption data memory 804 and utilized. Thus, it can easily cope with the change in the detection characteristic. Even when an ink cartridge having new specifications is used, the printing apparatus can of course easily utilize the detection characteristic data of that ink cartridge.

**[0224]** Further preferably, the detection characteristic data are measured for each ink cartridge and stored in the consumption data memory 804. Though the specifications of the cartridges are the same, the detection characteristics differ due to manufacturing irregularity. For example, the detection characteristics differ depending on the shape and thickness of the container. In the present embodiment, each ink cartridge has its own consumption data memory 804, so that its own detection characteristic data can be stored in the consumption data memory 804. Thus, the effect of the manufacturing irregularity on the detection can be minimized, so as to improve detection accuracy. In this manner, the present embodiment is advantageous in clarifying the difference between the detection characteristics of the ink cartridges.

**[0225]** Moreover, the detection characteristic data may take a form of 'correction data' serving as data for correcting the detection data which a printer driver of the printer (ink-jet recording apparatus) has in advance. The printer driver has a reference characteristic for use with detection. The detection characteristic data of the memory in the cartridge are data for correcting the reference characteristic data by complying with the type of the cartridge in use and the difference found in the cartridge itself. The detection characteristic data may be a specific correction value. Or, the detec-



tion characteristic data as the correction data may be an identification symbol. The correction corresponding to this identification symbol is performed in the printer side.

**[0226]** The consumption data memory 804 further stores the ink related data, as a memory means for the liquid container of the present invention. The consumption data memory 804 stores data on the type of ink. Moreover, this memory means stores a manufactured data, cleaning sequence data, image processing data and so on. These data can be suitably utilized in controlling the ink-jet recording apparatus.

**[0227]** Fig. 48 shows a processing of the consumption detecting process unit 812 utilizing the consumption data memory 804. First, whether or not the ink cartridge is mounted is judged (S10). That a new or halfway used ink cartridge is mounted can be detected. This processing uses a switch (not shown) equipped with the ink-jet recording apparatus. When the cartridge is mounted, detection characteristic data are read out of the consumption data memory 804 (S12) and then the consumption state data are read out (S14). Consumption data indicating unit 814 and print operation control unit 816 in the recording device control unit 810 utilize the read-out consumption state data.

**[0228]** Using the liquid sensor 802, the consumption detecting process unit 812 detects the ink consumption state based on the read-out detection characteristic data (S16). The detected consumption state is stored in the consumption data memory 804 (S18). This consumption state is also utilized in the recording device control unit 810. Whether or not the ink cartridge is removed is judged (S20). If not removed, return to S16.

**[0229]** Next, a proper timing at which the detection characteristic data are stored in the consumption data memory 804 will be described. Here, suppose that measured values of individual cartridges' detection characteristics are stored.

**[0230]** Referring to Fig. 49, the consumption data memory 804 which stores a standard detection characteristic is mounted on a new ink cartridge. After this ink cartridge is mounted to the ink-jet recording device, the detection characteristic is measured. The detection characteristic is measured between after the mounting and immediately before the printing operation. In order to reliably carry out the measurement, the detection characteristic is preferably measured after the mounting.

**[0231]** The detection characteristic is measured in a same manner as detecting a normal ink consumption. The consumption state is detected by using the liquid sensor 802, and its detected result (measured value) is recorded as the detection characteristic of a new ink cartridge. The standard detection characteristic which was initially set is changed to the measured value. The progression status of the ink consumption is determined from a difference between the detection characteristic and a newly obtained detection result.

**[0232]** According to the present embodiment, by adjusting the detection characteristic at its initial stage, the irregularity caused by the individual difference of the ink cartridges can be appropriately absorbed, thus improving detection accuracy.

**[0233]** Another proper timing at which the detection characteristic data are stored in the consumption data memory 804 will be described. The measured value of the detection characteristic data may be stored during a manufacturing process of the ink cartridge. In this case too, the irregularity caused by the difference of individual cartridges can be properly absorbed and can improve the detection accuracy. In this mode of embodiment, the detection characteristic prior to ink injection can be measured and recorded. Thus, the measured values of both the detection characteristics after and before the consumption can be stored in the consumption data memory 804.

**[0234]** Next, arrangement of the liquid sensor 802 and the consumption data memory 804 on the ink cartridge 800 will be described.

**[0235]** The liquid sensor 802 and the consumption data memory 804 may be arranged at different places on the ink cartridges 800 (see Fig. 1, Fig. 7 and soon). The liquid sensor 802 and the consumption data memory 804 may be arranged at different places on the same wall surface on the ink cartridge 800 (see Figs. 42A, 42B and 42C). The liquid sensor 802 and the consumption data memory 804 may be arranged respectively at different wall surfaces of the ink cartridge 800 (see Fig. 1). The wall surface on which the liquid sensor 802 is arranged may be positioned perpendicular to a wall surface on which the consumption data memory 804 is arranged (see Fig. 7 and Fig. 9).

**[0236]** Referring to Fig. 50, the liquid sensor 802 and the consumption data memory 804 are provided preferably in a center portion of the container in the cross direction. In Fig. 50, a supply port 830 is provided on the lower surface of the cartridge. The liquid sensor 802 and the consumption data memory 804 are provided in the vertical wall. These are all positioned in the container in the cross direction. Furthermore, the liquid sensor 802 and the consumption data memory 804 are provided in the vicinity of the supply port 830. Advantageous aspects of this arrangement will be described below.

**[0237]** Figs. 51A and 51B show an exemplary positioning of the supply port. There is provided a quadrangle positioning projection 832 in the periphery of the supply port (not shown) in the cartridge's lower surface. The positioning projection 832 is inserted to and engaged with a positioning concave part 834 in the recording device side. The positioning concave part 834 has a form corresponding to the positioning projection 832.

**[0238]** In the above structure, the ink cartridge is positioning-made to the ink-jet recording apparatus at the supply port 830. The supply port 830, the liquid sensor 802 and the consumption data memory 804 are all provided in the central portion of the container in the cross direction. Even though the cartridge is mounted in such a manner of being

rotated a little bit in the horizontal direction about the supply port 830, an amount of the positioning displacement of the liquid sensor 802 and the consumption data memory 804 caused by such the rotation is rather small, thereby the positioning accuracy can be improved.

**[0239]** As shown in the above examples, a high positioning accuracy is generally required for the supply port, so that a positioning structure satisfying this requirement is provided. By providing the sensor and memory in the vicinity of the supply port, the structure for use with supply port positioning functions as the structure for use with the sensor and memory positioning. A single positioning structure operates not only as for the supply port but also as for the sensor and memory. A simple structure makes possible the positioning of the sensor and memory, and can also improve the detection accuracy.

**[0240]** In still another preferable embodiment, the liquid sensor 802 and the consumption data memory 804 are provided on a same consumption detecting base plate. Figs. 42A, 42B and 42C illustrate this structure. Referring to Figs. 42A, 42B and 42C, the semiconductor memory 7 and the actuator 106 are provided on the same base plate 610. In this structure, the sensor and the memory can be mounted with ease. Moreover, in Fig. 52, a consumption detecting base plate 836 is provided in the vicinity of the supply port 830 and is arranged in the center of the cross direction of the container. Thereby, the positioning displacement can be minimized as described above.

**[0241]** Moreover, the mounting module in which the liquid sensor (actuator) and the mounting structure are integrally formed is preferably mounted to the consumption detecting base plate. The mounting module is shown in Fig. 32 and soon. As described above, provision of the mounting module can protect the liquid sensor from external force, and can facilitate the mounting itself and simplify the operation, thus reducing the cost.

**[0242]** Referring back to Figs. 42A, 42B and 42C, in the present embodiment, there is provided a positioning structure which positioning-performs on the consumption detecting base plate against the liquid container. Though the reference numerals are omitted in Fig. 42B, a plurality of projections for use in mounting the base plate are protruded outwardly from the ink cartridge as shown in a side view of Fig. 42B. These projections function as positioning means. There are provided five projections. As shown in the front view of Fig. 42C, there are one projection in the upper portion, two in the central portion and another two in the lower portion. These projections are inserted to and engaged with positioning holes (and mounting holes) of the base plate 610. Since the base plate is accurately positioning-made by these, the accuracy of mounting positions can be further improved.

**[0243]** The positioning structure of the base plate is not limited to the above description. A cut-out groove may be engaged with the projection. The base plate may be inserted to and engaged with the concave part in the container side. At the time of mounting, the periphery of the base plate is constrained by the inner wall of the concave part, thereby realizing the positioning. The circumference of the concave part may not have the same shape as the circumference of the base plate. There are provided at least two ribs in the concave part, and the base plate may be sandwiched by these ribs.

**[0244]** Next, still another embodiment of the present invention will be described. Fig. 53 is a functional block diagram for an ink-jet recording apparatus equipped with the ink consumption detecting device according to the present embodiment. Differing from the structure in Fig. 47, an ink cartridge 900 consists only of a liquid sensor 902. A consumption data memory 910 is arranged in a recording device control unit 904.

**[0245]** Similar to the structure in Fig. 47, the recording device control unit 904 comprises a consumption detecting process unit 906, a consumption data indicating unit 912 and a print operation control unit 914. The consumption data indicating unit 912 indicates to the user the detected consumption state by using a display 916 and a speaker 918. The print operation control unit 914 controls a print operation unit 920 based on the detected consumption state.

**[0246]** The recording device control unit 904 further includes a cartridge identifying unit 908. The ink consumption detecting device comprises the consumption detecting process unit 906, the cartridge identifying unit 908, the consumption data memory 910 and the liquid sensor 902.

**[0247]** The cartridge identifying unit 908 identifies an ink cartridge mounted in the ink-jet recording apparatus. Consumption related data corresponding to the identified ink cartridge are read out of the consumption data memory 910. As described above, the consumption related data include the consumption state data and the detection characteristic data. The consumption state data obtained as a result of detection are used in the consumption data indicating unit 912 and the print operation control unit 914. The detection characteristic data are used for a detection process in the consumption detecting process unit 906.

**[0248]** Operations for the above described detection device will now be described. When the ink cartridge 900 is mounted, the cartridge identifying unit 908 identifies the ink cartridge 900, so that the identifying data are stored in the consumption data memory 910. For example, an identification number attached to the ink cartridge 900 is read out. The identifying data may be obtained from the liquid sensor 902. As described using Fig. 49, at the time of mounting the cartridge, the detection characteristic is measured is stored in the consumption data memory 910. Utilizing this detection characteristic, the consumption state is measured and is recorded in the consumption data memory 910.

**[0249]** Suppose that the ink cartridge 900 is removed, and is now mounted again. Then, the data on the cartridge mounted again remains in the consumption data memory 910. That data are read out and used for a processing there-



after.

[0250] In this manner, according to the present embodiment, the similar advantages to the above embodiments are obtained even if the consumption data memory is arranged in the recording device side.

[0251] Various modifications applying the present embodiment are possible. For example, the consumption data memory may be provided separately in the ink cartridge and the recording device control unit. One of the memory may record the consumption state while other memory may record the detection characteristic data. Moreover, one may be record the standard detection characteristic data while other may record the measured values of the detection characteristic.

[0252] In still another embodiment, the consumption data memory may be provided in the ink cartridge while the liquid sensor may be provided in the recording device side. Such structures may be found in Figs. 15A and 15B. Moreover, there may be provided a structure such that both the liquid sensor and the consumption data memory are provided in the recording apparatus.

[0253] Other modifications according to the present embodiment will be described.

[0254] In the present embodiment, the consumption state obtained as a result of the detection and the detection characteristic data for use with detection are recorded in the consumption data memory as the consumption related data. On the contrary, only one of the data may be recorded.

[0255] In Fig. 47 and Fig. 52, a single liquid sensor is provided in the ink cartridge. In contrast, there may be provided a plurality of the liquid sensors. By utilizing these plural liquid sensors, detailed consumption data can be recorded. Moreover, the detection characteristic data are preferably recorded for each liquid sensor.

[0256] In the present embodiment, the liquid sensor is structured by the piezoelectric element. As described before, the change in the acoustic impedance may be detected using the piezoelectric element. The consumption state may be detected utilizing the reflected wave of the elastic wave. The time required to travel from generation of the elastic wave to the arrival of the reflected wave is obtained. The consumption state may be detected by some principle utilizing a function of the piezoelectric element.

[0257] In the present embodiment, the liquid sensor generates vibration and also generates a detection signal which indicates the ink consumption state. In contrast, the liquid sensor may be such that it does not generate vibration. That is, the liquid sensor may not be such that it does not generate both the vibration and the detection signal output. The vibration is generated by an actuator. Or, the liquid sensor may generate the detection signal which indicates the ink consumption state when vibration is caused in the ink cartridge accompanied by the movement of the carriage or the like. Then, without generating the vibration in a positive manner, the ink consumption is detected by utilizing the vibration caused naturally by the printing operation.

[0258] The function of the recording device control unit shown in Fig. 47 and Fig. 52 may be realized by other than a computer of the recording apparatus. Part of or whole function may be provided in an externally provided computer. The display and speaker may be provided in an externally provided computer.

[0259] In the present embodiment, the liquid container is an ink cartridge while the liquid utilizing apparatus is an ink-jet recording apparatus. However, the liquid container may be an ink container other than the ink cartridge and ink tank. For example, a sub-tank in the head side may serve as such. Moreover, the ink cartridge may be an cartridge of the so-called off-carriage type. Moreover, the present invention may be applied to a container which houses liquid other than ink.

[0260] As described above, by implementing the structure in which the memory means is provided in the liquid container, the detection result can be suitably utilized and the detection capability is significantly improved.

[0261] Although the present invention has been described by way of exemplary embodiments, it should be understood that many changes and substitutions may be made by those skilled in the art without departing from the spirit and the scope of the present invention which is defined only by the appended claims.

## Claims

1. A liquid container, comprising:

a housing accommodating liquid;  
a liquid supply opening formed in said housing;  
a liquid level detection device comprising a piezoelectric element; and  
a storing device mounted on a wall of said housing.

2. The liquid container according to claim 1, wherein said storing device stores information relating to a liquid consumption status.

3. The liquid container according to claim 2, wherein the information relating to the liquid consumption status is gen-

erated by said detecting device.

4. The liquid container according to claim 2, wherein the information comprises a detection characteristics information employed for detecting the liquid consumption status by said detecting device.
5. The liquid container according to claim 2, wherein said storing device stores information indicating detection characteristics before the liquid contained in the container starts to be consumed.
6. The liquid container according to claim 2, wherein said storing device stores information indicating detection characteristics which is expected to be detected when the liquid is consumed up to be a predetermined target level.
7. The liquid container according to claim 4 to 6, wherein the detection characteristics information comprises a resonance frequency characteristics.
8. The liquid container according to claim 1, further comprising a substrate mounted on said housing, and said detecting device and said storing device are disposed on said substrate.
9. The liquid container according to claim 1, wherein said liquid level detection device detects a liquid consumption status on the basis of a change in the acoustic impedance.
10. The liquid container according to claim 1, wherein said detection device detects a liquid consumption status on the basis of a change in a residual vibration thereof.
11. The liquid container according to claim 1, wherein said detection device detects a liquid consumption status on the basis of a change in a resonant frequency thereof.
12. The liquid container according to claim 1, wherein said storing device comprises a semiconductor memory.
13. An ink cartridge for an ink jet printer, comprising: a housing accommodating therein ink;  
an ink supply opening formed in said housing;  
an ink level detection device comprising a piezoelectric element; and  
a storing device mounted on a wall of said housing.
14. The ink cartridge according to claim 13, wherein said storing device stores information relating to an ink consumption status.
15. The ink cartridge according to claim 14, wherein the information relating to the ink consumption status is generated by said detecting device.
16. The ink cartridge according to claim 14, wherein the information comprises a detection characteristics information employed for detecting the ink consumption status by said detecting device.
17. The ink cartridge according to claim 16, wherein said storing device stores information indicating detection characteristics before the ink contained in said housing starts to be consumed.
18. The ink cartridge according to claim 16, wherein said storing device stores information indicating detection characteristics which is expected to be detected when ink is consumed up to be a predetermined target level.
19. The ink cartridge according to claim 16 to 18, wherein the detection characteristics information comprises a resonance frequency characteristics.
20. The ink cartridge according to claim 13, further comprising a substrate mounted on said housing, and said detecting device and said storing device are disposed on said substrate.
21. The ink cartridge according to claim 13 wherein said ink level detection device detects an ink consumption status on the basis of a change in the acoustic impedance.

22. The ink cartridge according to claim 13, wherein said detection device detects a liquid consumption status on the basis of a change in a residual vibration thereof.

23. The ink cartridge according to claim 13, wherein said detection device detects a liquid consumption status on the basis of a change in a resonant frequency thereof.

24. The ink cartridge according to claim 18, wherein said storing device comprises a semiconductor memory.

25. An ink jet printer, comprising:

a print operation section comprising a print head ejecting ink droplets through nozzles;  
an ink cartridge connecting with said print head for accommodating ink therein, said ink cartridge comprising:  
a housing accommodating therein ink;

an ink supply opening formed in said housing;

an ink level detection device comprising a piezoelectric element; and  
a storing device mounted on a wall of said housing,

a control section connecting with said ink level detection device and said storing device of said ink cartridge.

26. The ink jet printer according to claim 25 wherein said ink level detection device of said ink cartridge detects an ink consumption status on the basis of a change in the acoustic impedance.

27. The ink jet printer according to claim 25, wherein said detection device detects an ink consumption status on the basis of a change in a residual vibration thereof.

28. The ink jet printer according to claim 25, wherein said detection device detects an ink consumption status on the basis of a change in a resonant frequency thereof.

29. The ink jet printer according to claim 25, wherein said storing device stores information relating to an ink consumption status.

30. The ink jet printer according to claim 25, wherein said control section comprises:

a signal processing section connecting with said detection device for receiving an output signal thereof; and  
a head control section connecting with said print operation section, said print control section controlling said print operation section in accordance with a signal processed by said signal processing section.

31. A liquid detecting device, comprising:

a substrate;  
a sensor mounted on a first portion of said substrate, said sensor comprising a piezoelectric element; and  
a memory mounted on a second portion of said substrate.

32. The liquid detecting substrate according to claim 31, wherein said sensor detects a liquid consumption status on the basis of a change in a residual vibration thereof.

33. The liquid detecting substrate according to claim 31, wherein said sensor detects a liquid consumption status on the basis of a change in a resonant frequency thereof.

34. A liquid detection system, comprising:

a liquid container comprising:  
a housing accommodating therein liquid;  
a liquid supply opening formed in said housing; and

a liquid level detection device mounted on said housing, said detection device comprising a piezoelectric

element,  
a storing device mounted on a wall of said housing of said liquid container; and

a control section connecting with said ink level detection device and said storing device.

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35. The liquid detection system according to claim 34, wherein said liquid level detection device of said liquid container detects an ink consumption status on the basis of a change in the acoustic impedance.

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36. The liquid detection system according to claim 34, wherein said detection device detects a liquid consumption status on the basis of a change in a residual vibration thereof.

37. The liquid detection system according to claim 34, wherein said detection device detects a liquid consumption status on the basis of a change in a resonant frequency thereof.

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38. The liquid detection system according to claim 34, wherein said storing device stores information relating to a liquid consumption status.

39. The liquid detection system according to claim 34, wherein said control section comprises:

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a signal processing section connecting with said detection device for receiving an output signal thereof; and an operating section connecting to said signal processing section, said operating section activating a predetermined operation of an external system in accordance with an output signal of said control section.

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40. The liquid detection system according to claim 39, further comprising an information indicating section, and said control section further comprises an information control section receiving an output signal of said signal processing section and activating said information indicating section.

41. A method of detecting a liquid consumption status of liquid contained in a liquid container, comprising steps of:

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reading out information relating to a detection characteristics;  
reading out information relating to a liquid consumption status;  
detecting a new liquid consumption status of liquid contained in the liquid container; and  
storing the newly detected liquid consumption status in a memory mounted on the liquid container.

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42. The liquid consumption status detecting method according to claim 41, further comprising a step of storing the detection characteristics in the memory mounted on the liquid container.

43. The liquid consumption status detecting method according to claim 41, further comprising a step of judging whether the liquid container is installed at a predetermined position.

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44. The liquid consumption status detecting method according to claim 41, further comprising a step of judging whether the liquid container is detached from a predetermined position.

45. The liquid consumption status detecting method according to claim 41, further comprising a step of storing information relating to liquid type in the memory mounted on the liquid container.

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46. The liquid consumption status detecting method according to claim 41, further comprising a step of activating an external system in accordance with the detection result of said detection step.

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47. The liquid consumption status detecting method according to claim 41, wherein said detection step comprising a step of detecting a change in the acoustic impedance.

48. The liquid consumption status detecting method according to claim 41, wherein said detection step comprising a step of detecting a change in a residual vibration.

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49. The liquid consumption status detecting method according to claim 41, wherein said detection step comprising a step of detecting a change in a resonant frequency.

- 50.** The liquid consumption status detecting method according to claim 41, further comprising a step of processing a signal resulting from said detection step and a step of activating an external system in accordance with the result of said processing step.

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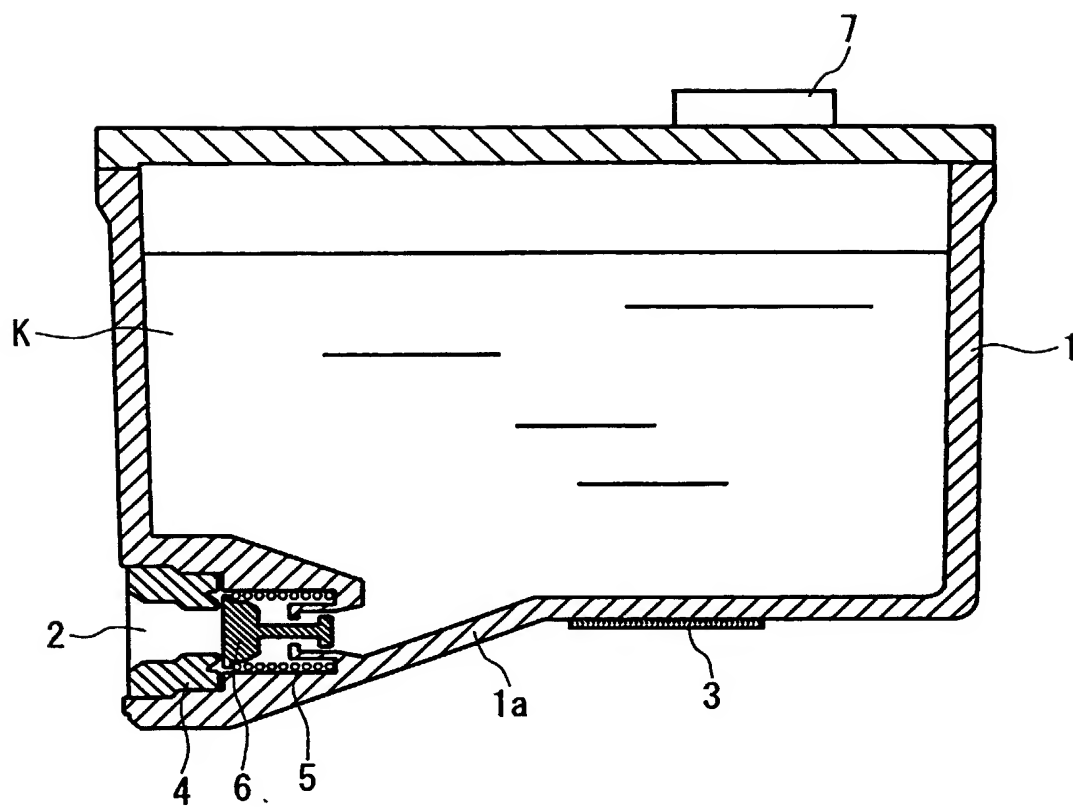
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**FIG. 1**

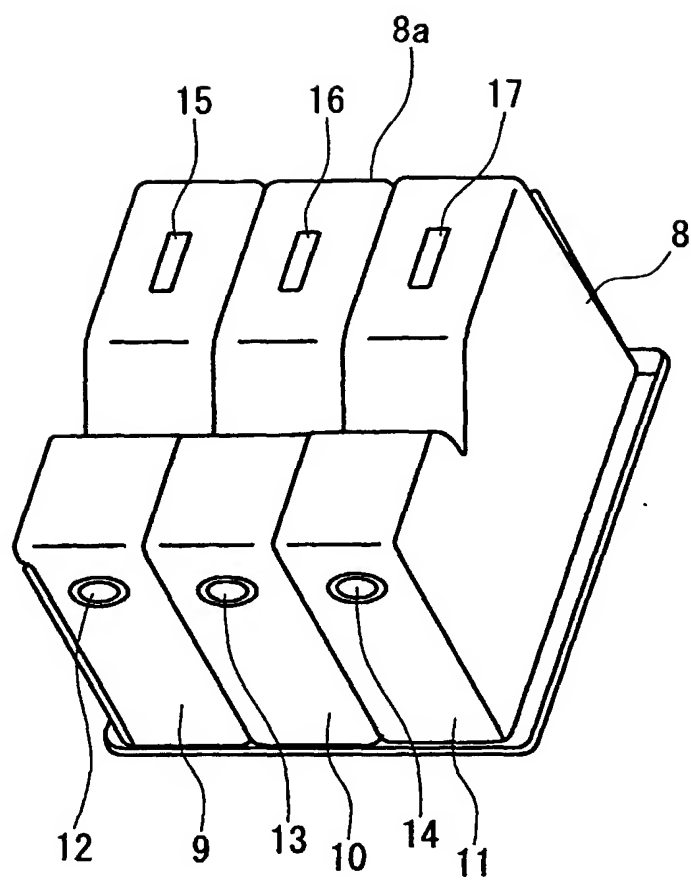
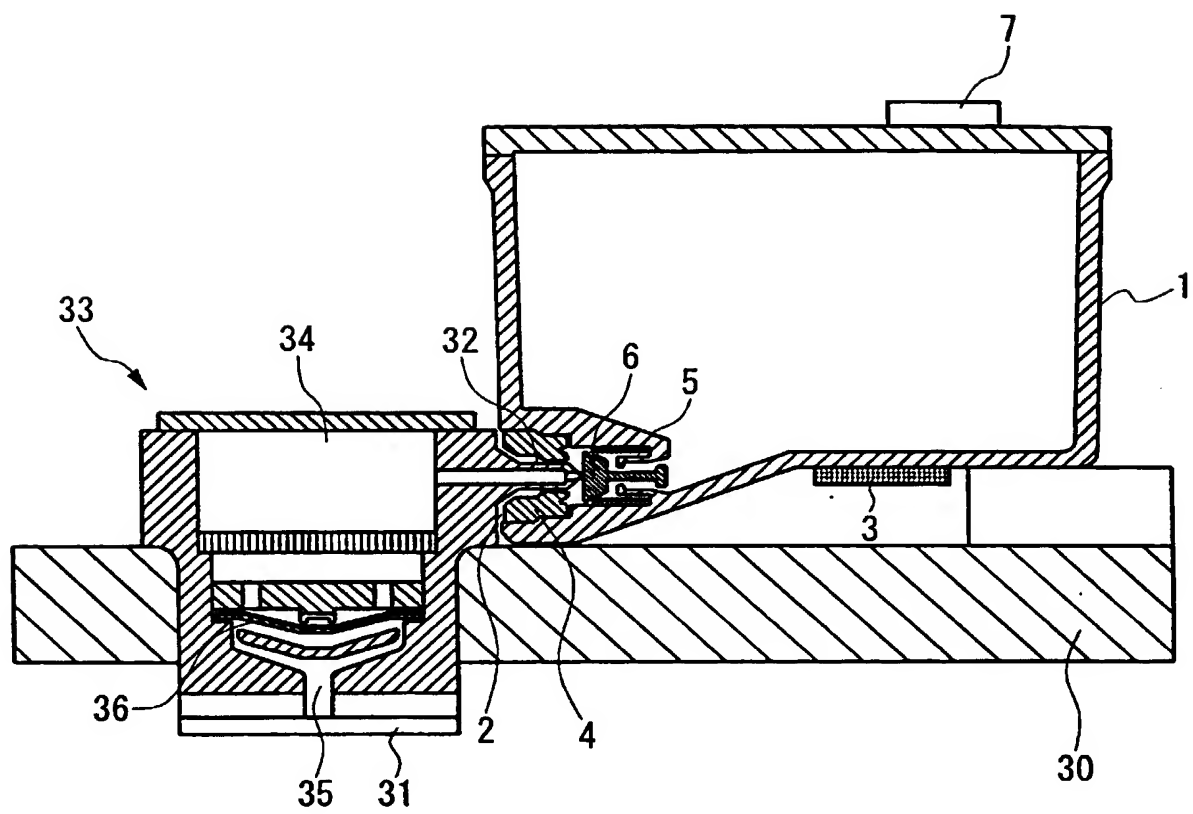
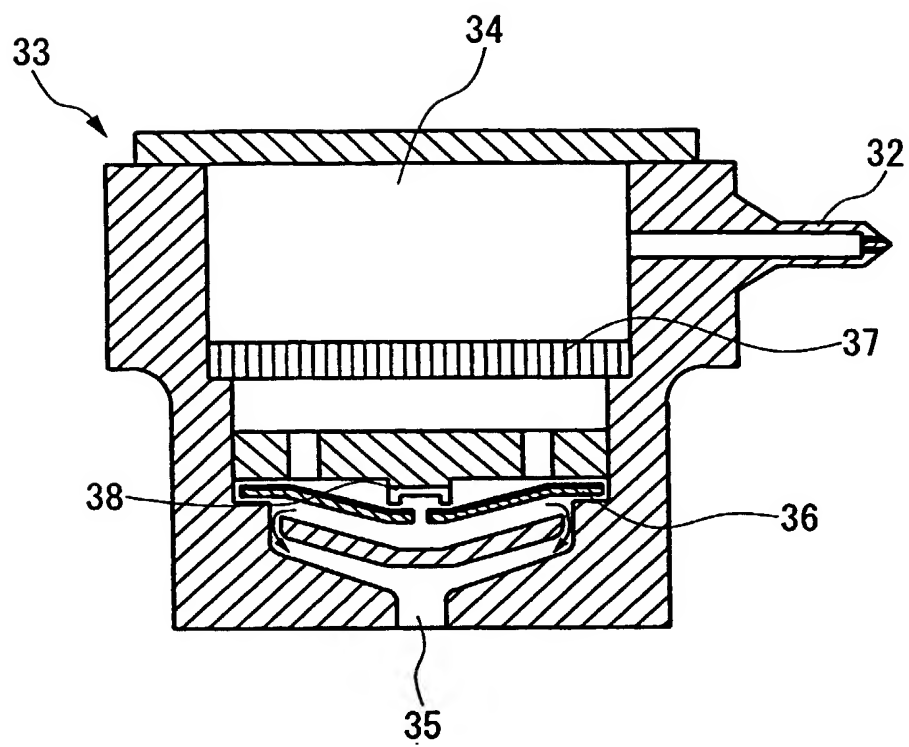


FIG. 2

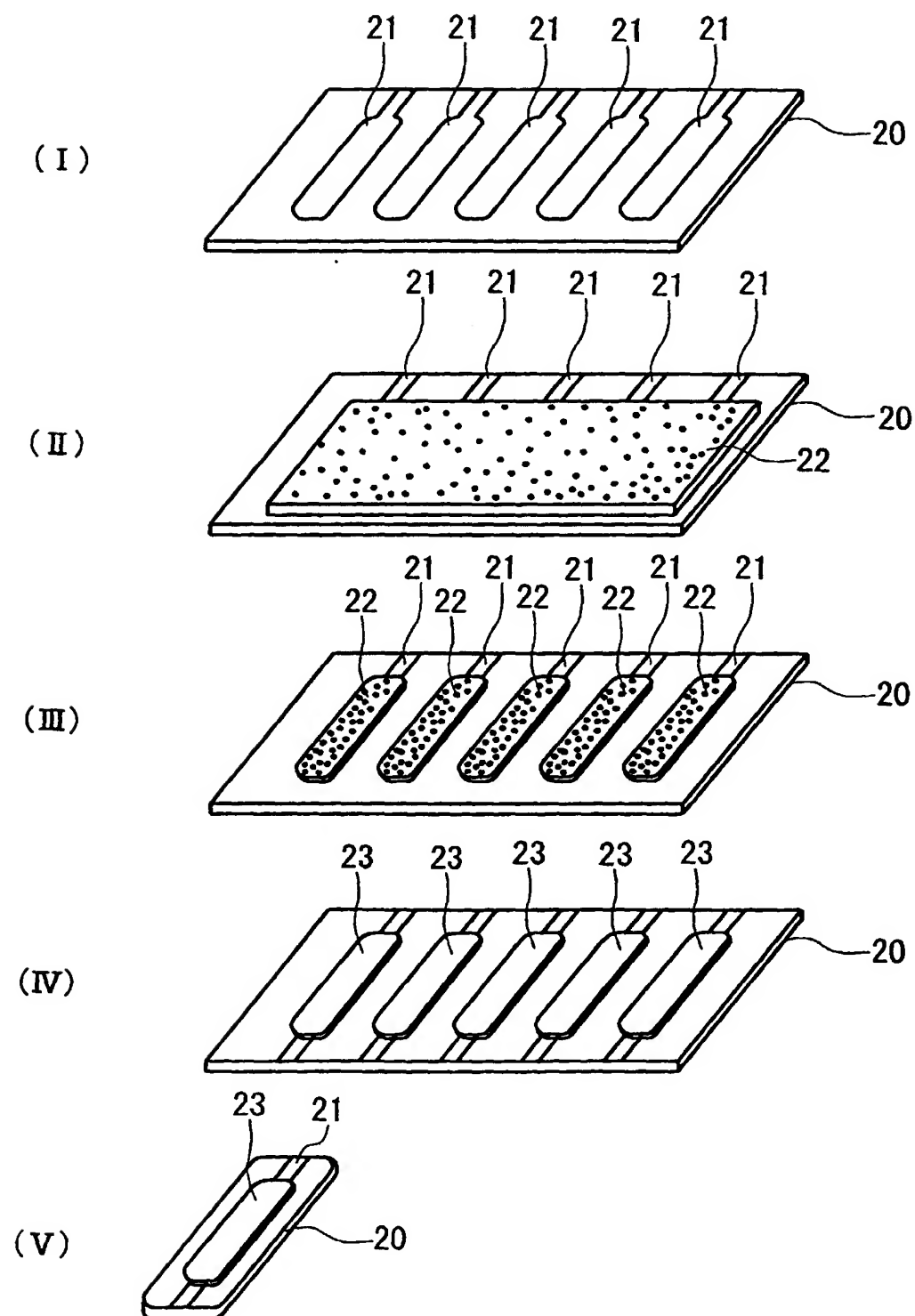


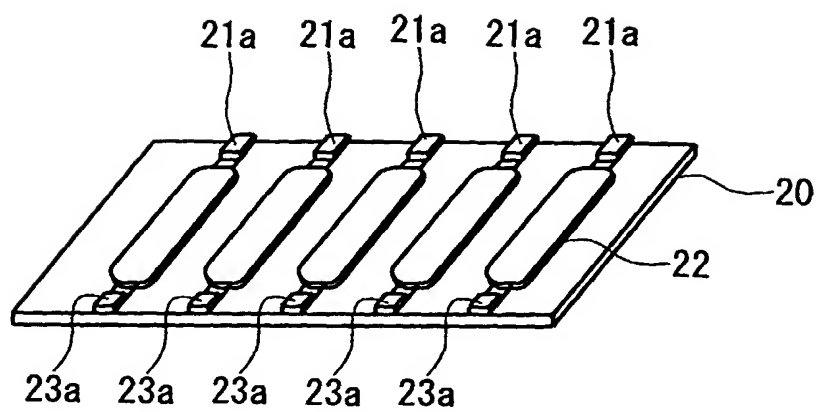
*FIG. 3*



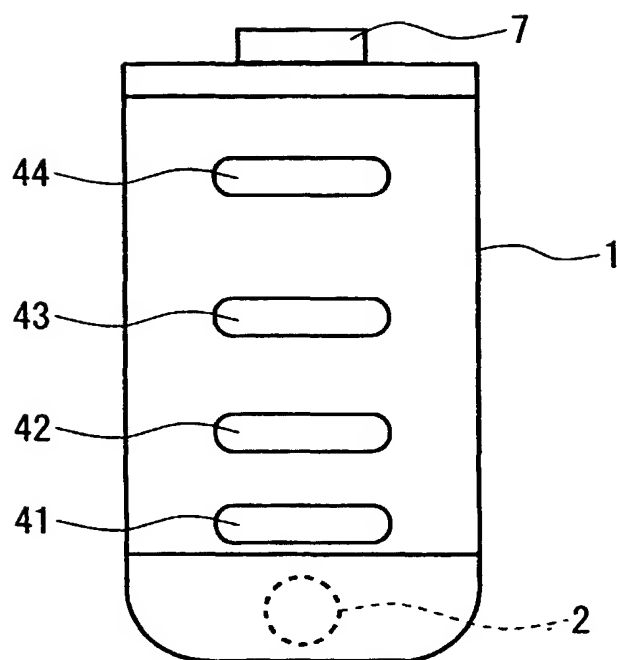


**FIG. 4**





*FIG. 6*



*FIG. 7*

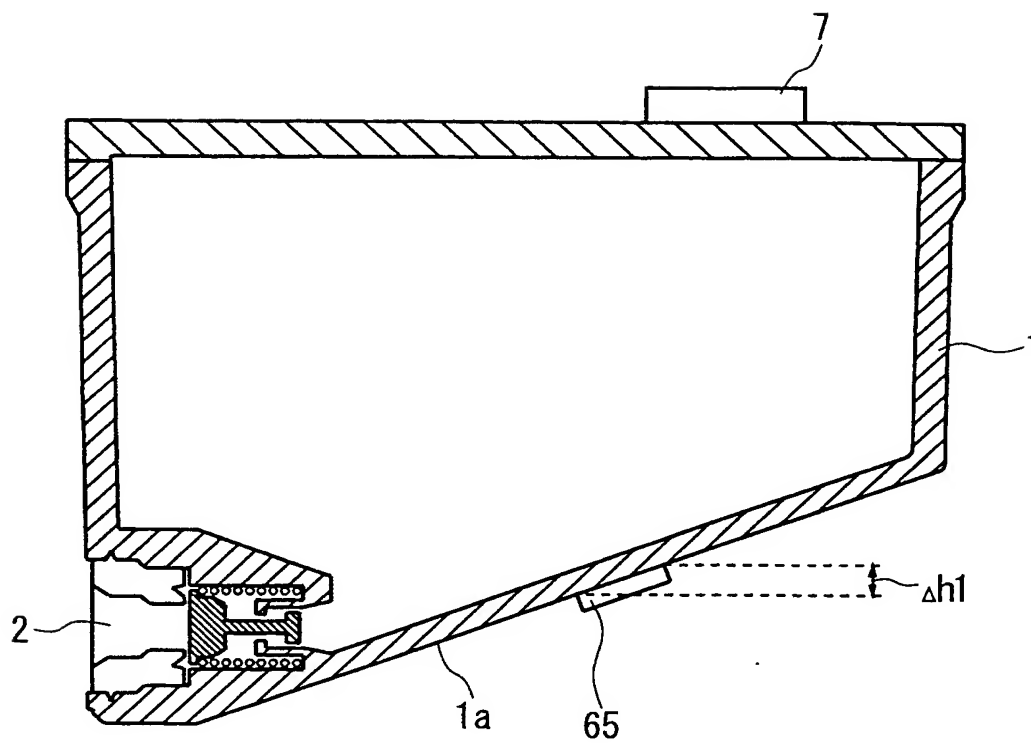


FIG. 8

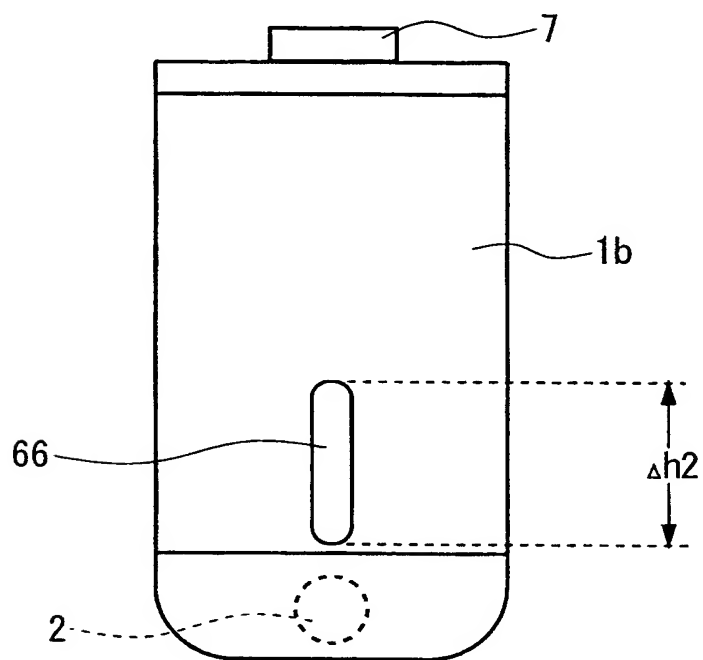
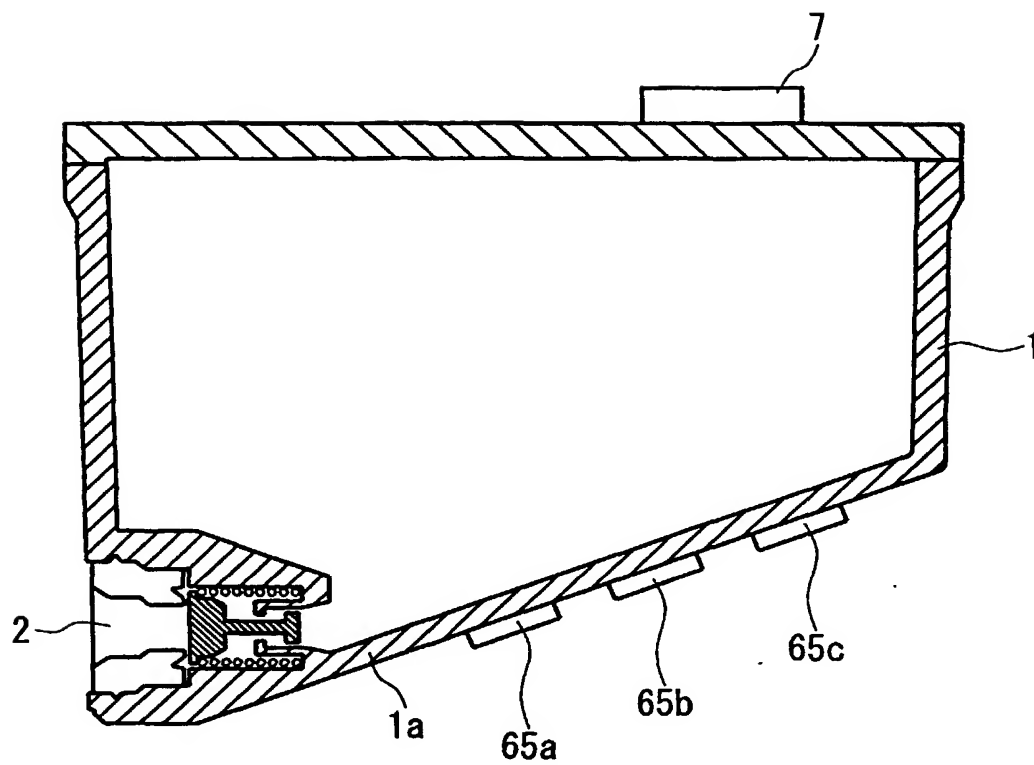


FIG. 9



**FIG. 10**

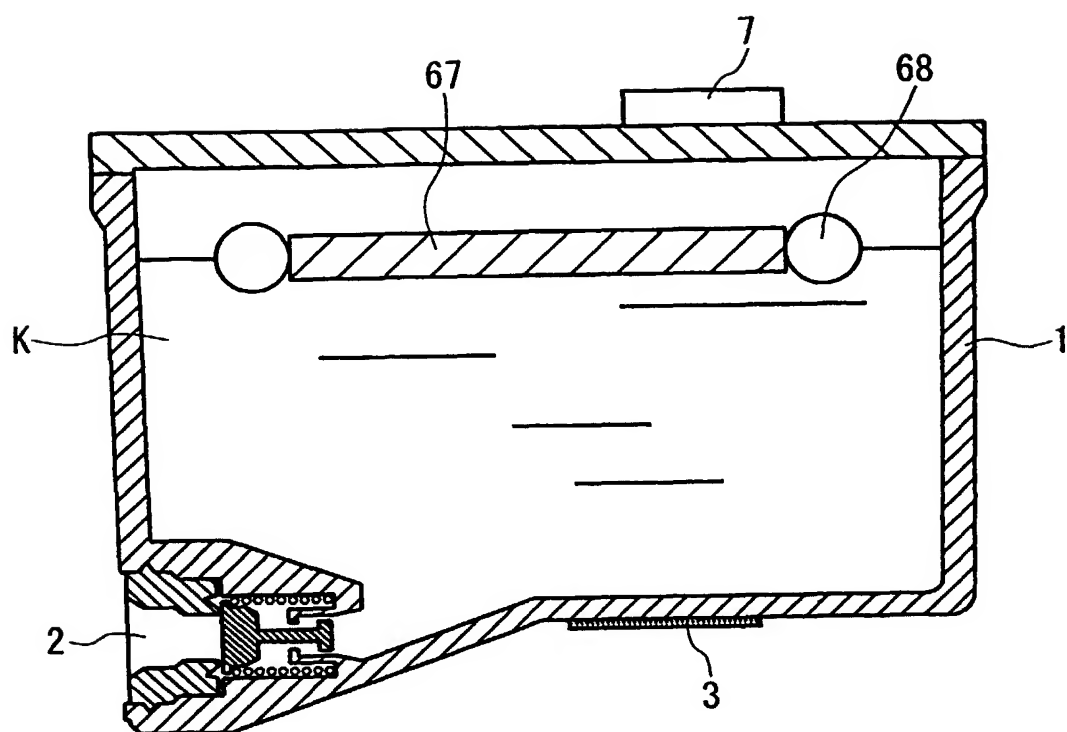


FIG. 11

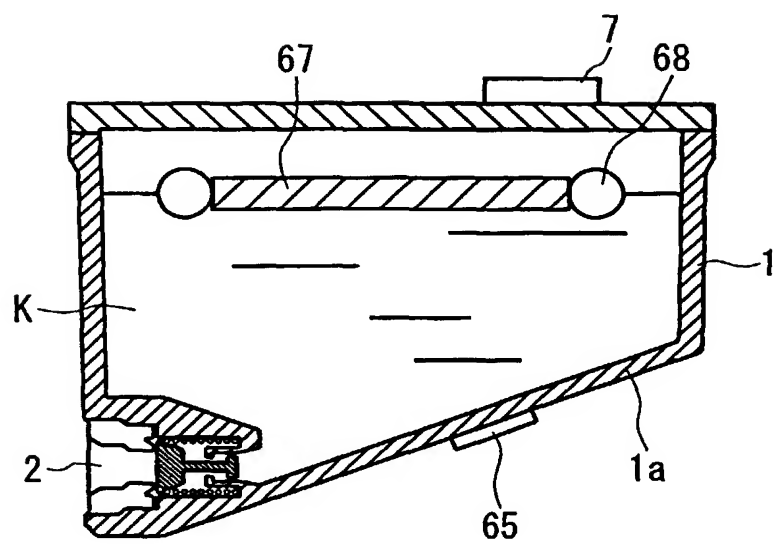


FIG. 12(A)

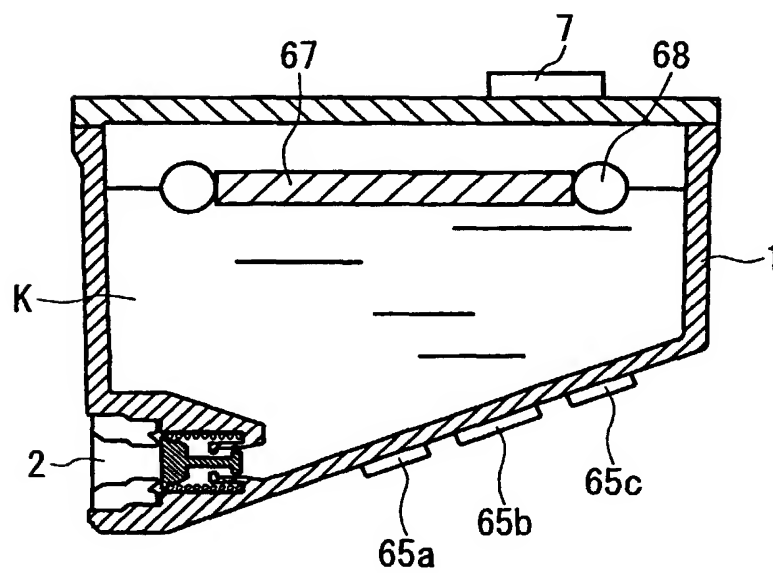
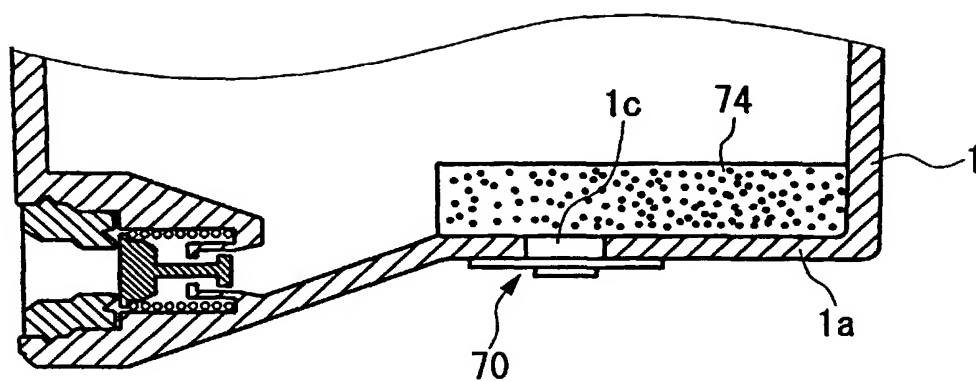
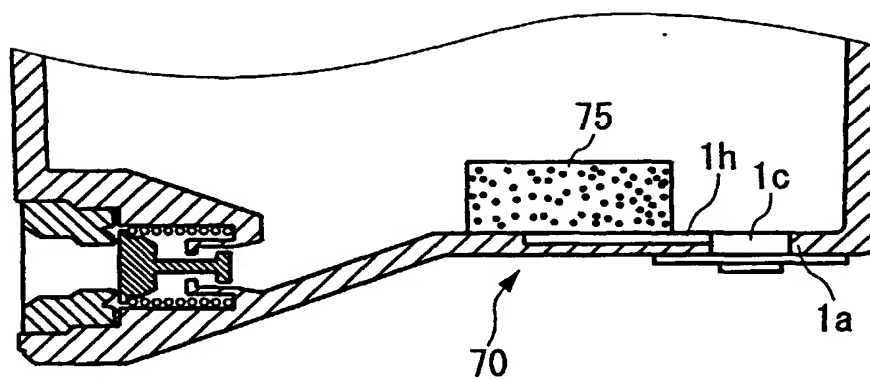


FIG. 12(B)

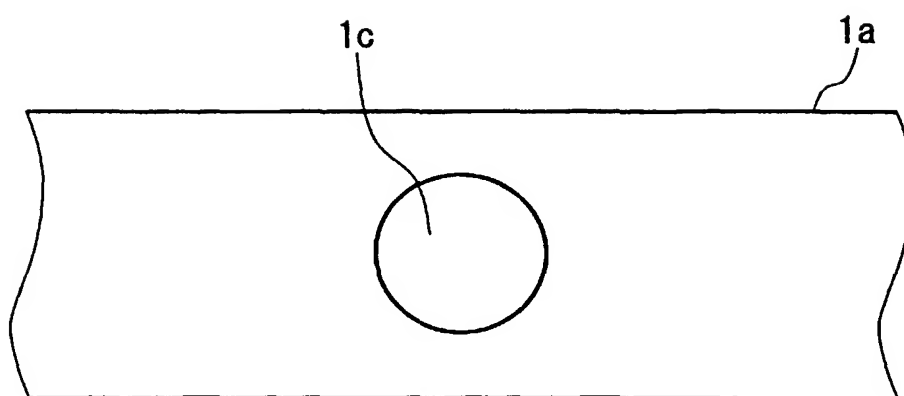




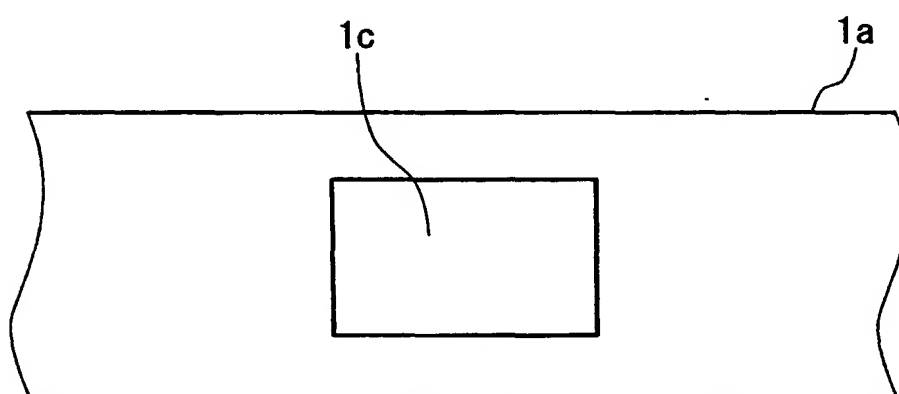
*FIG. 13(A)*



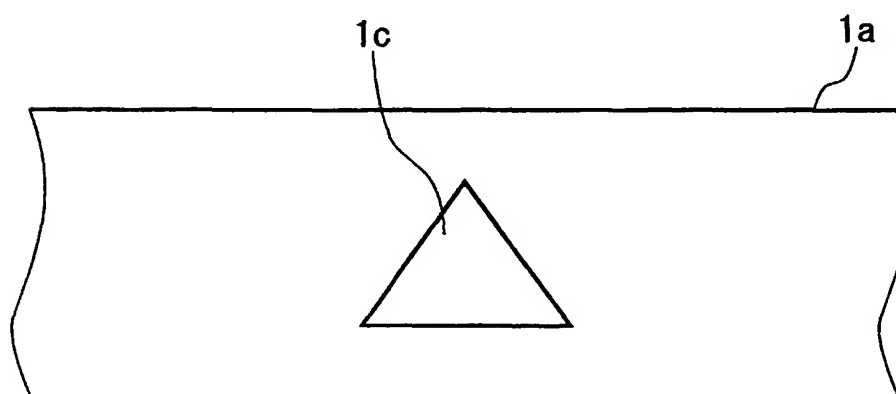
*FIG. 13(B)*



*FIG. 14(A)*



*FIG. 14(B)*



*FIG. 14(C)*

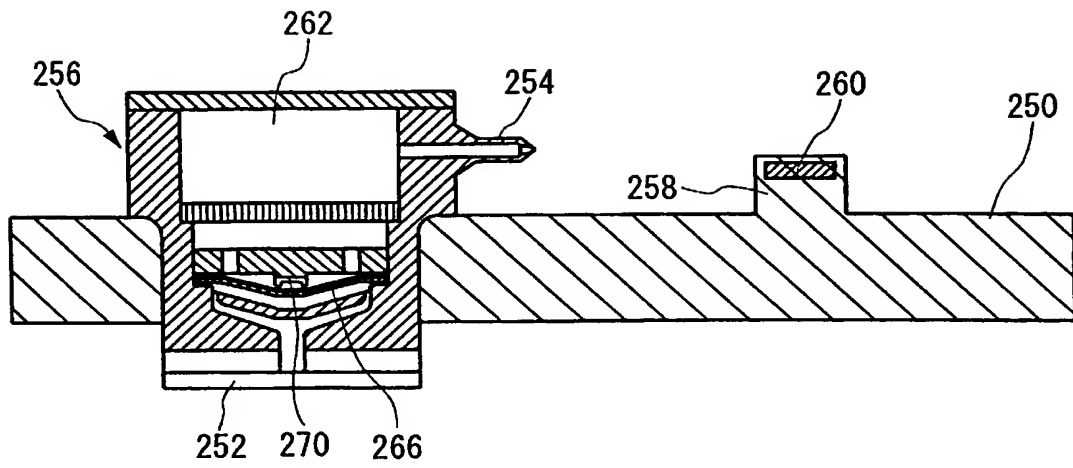


FIG. 15(A)

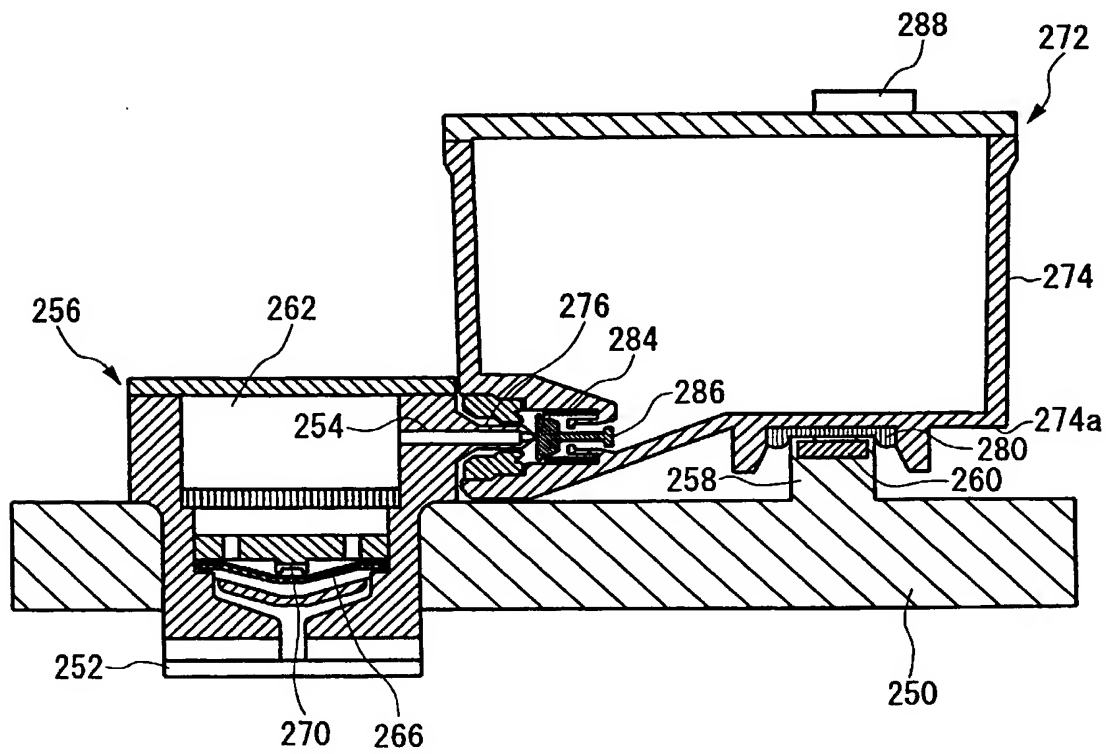


FIG. 15(B)

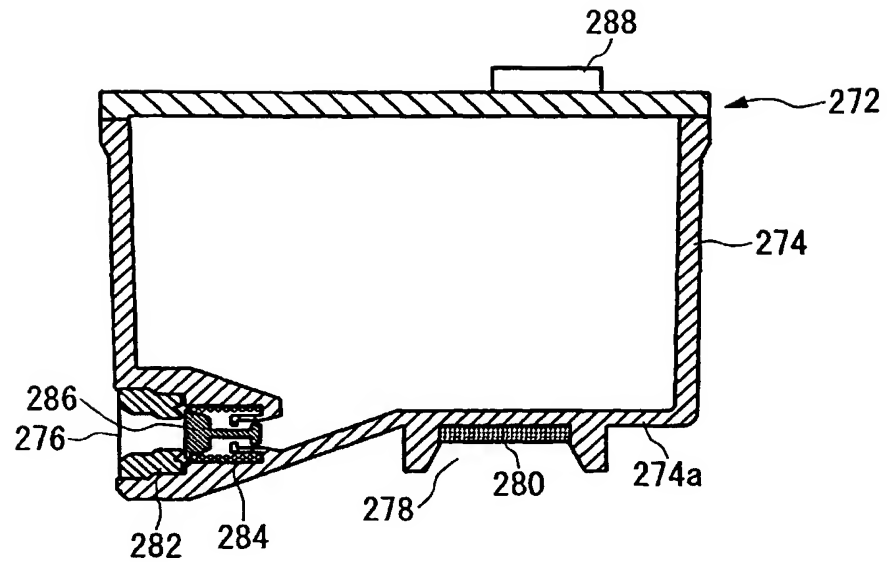


FIG. 16(A)

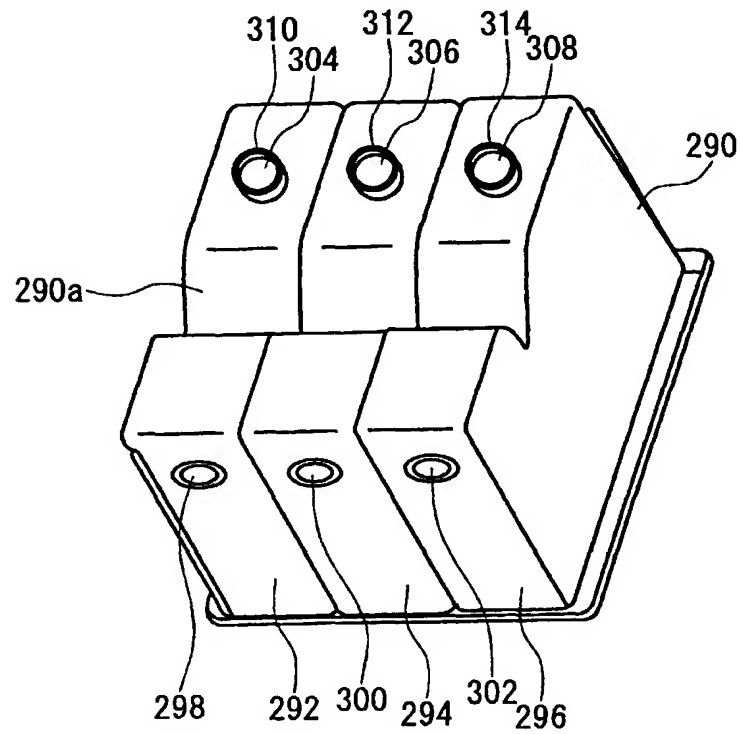


FIG. 16(B)

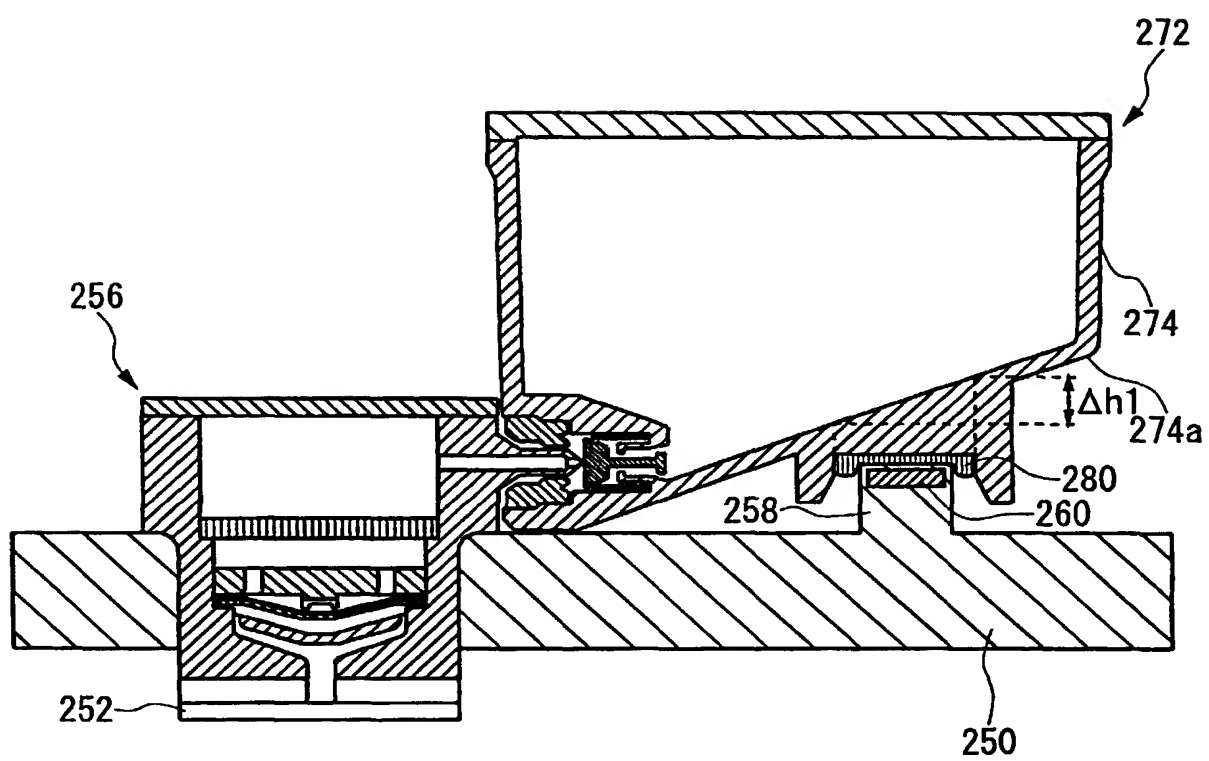
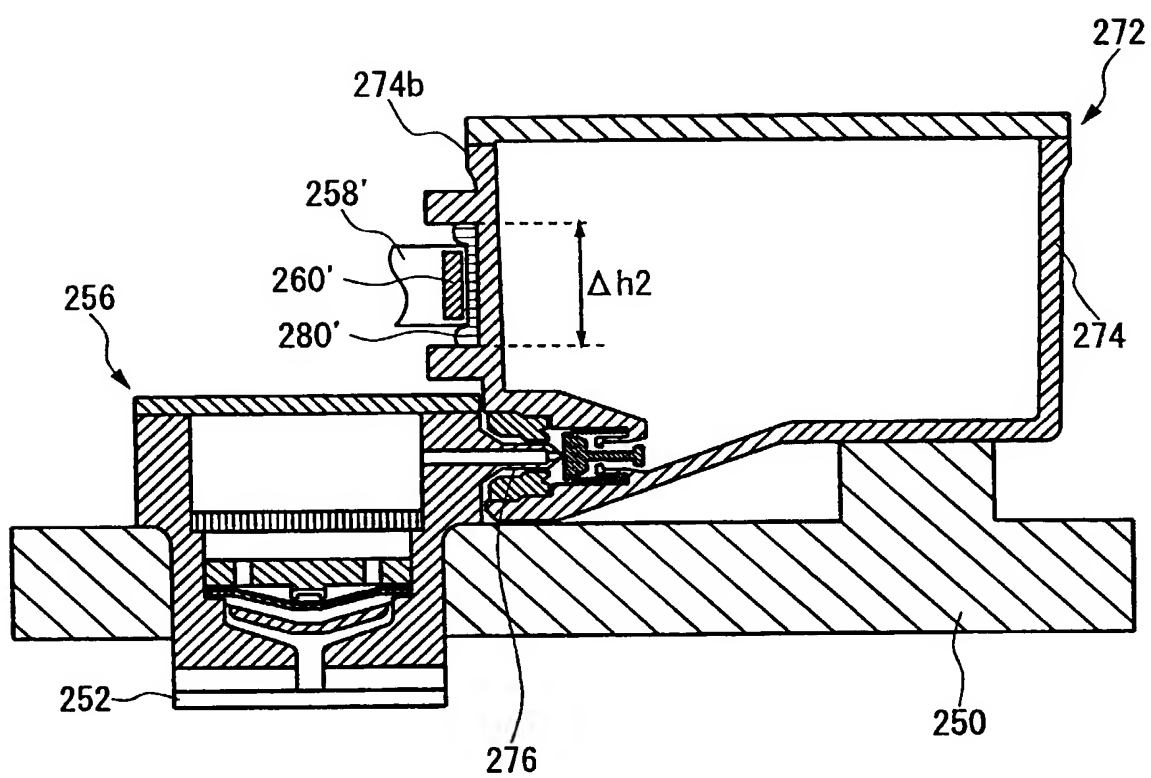
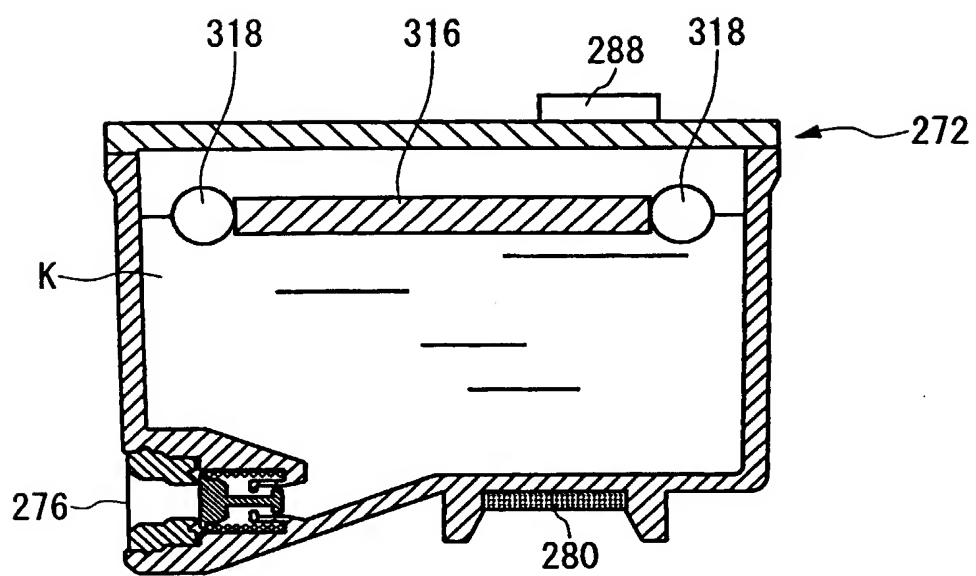


FIG. 17



*FIG. 18*



**FIG. 19**

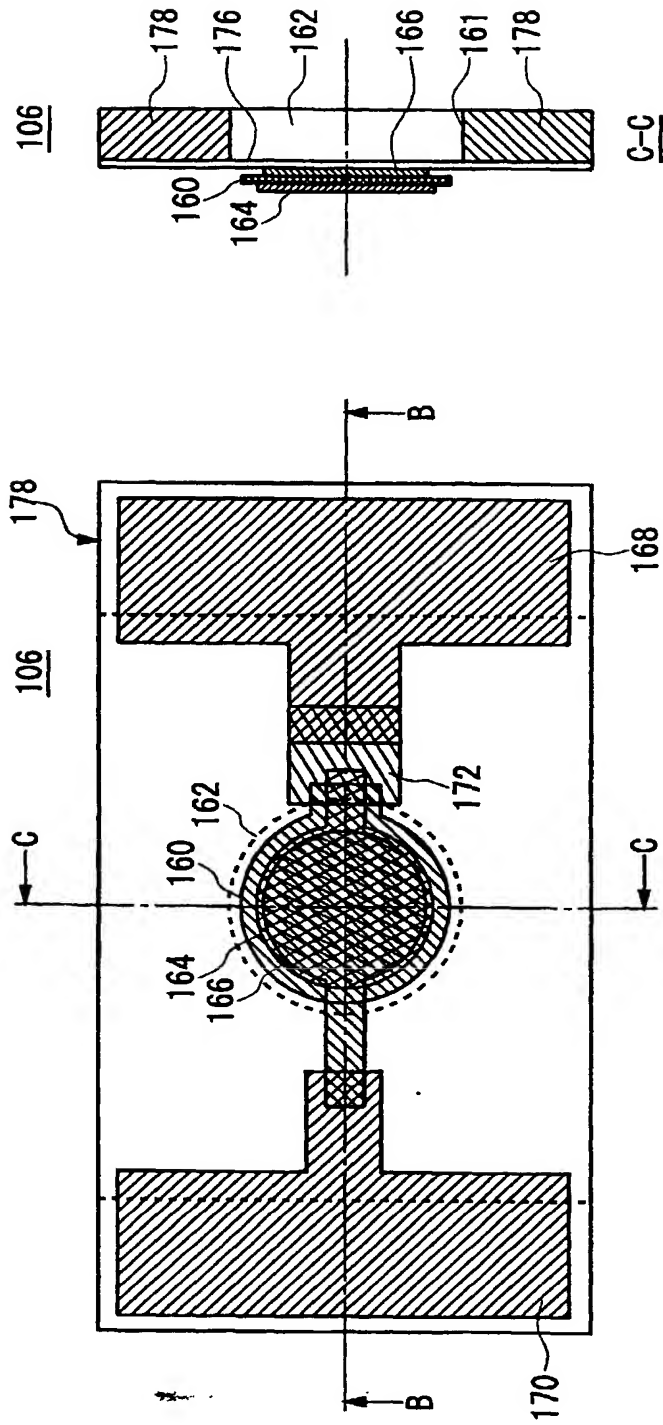


FIG. 20(A)

FIG. 20(C)

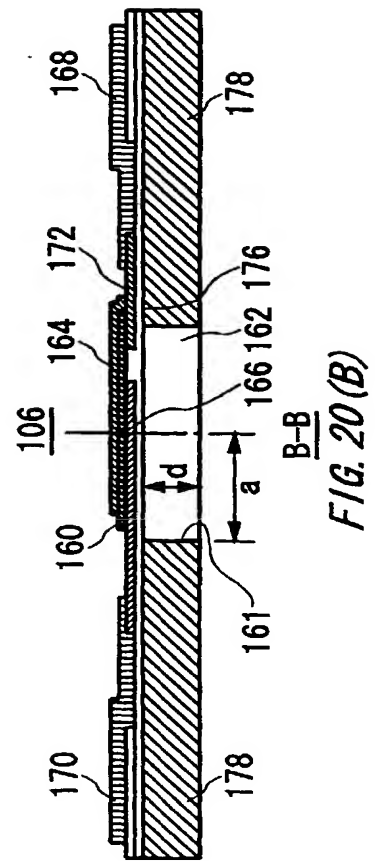


FIG. 20(B)



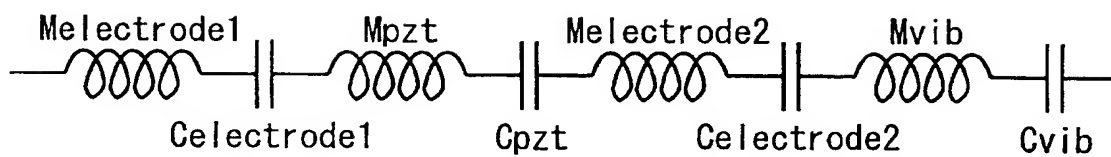


FIG. 21(A)

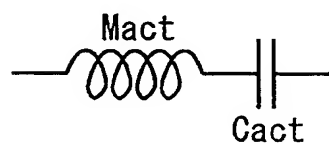


FIG. 21(B)

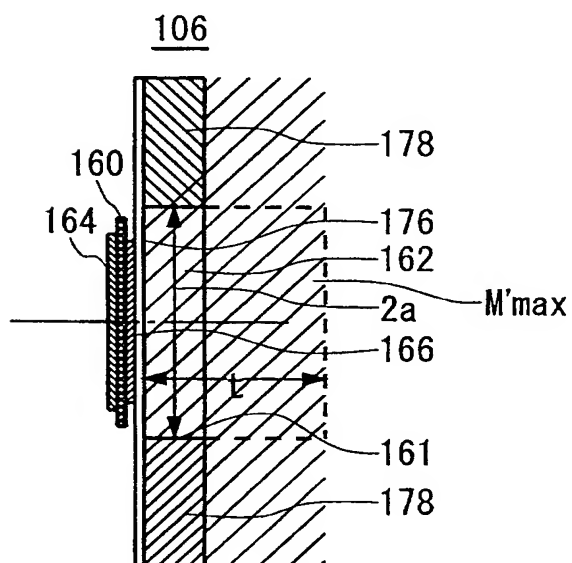


FIG. 21(C)

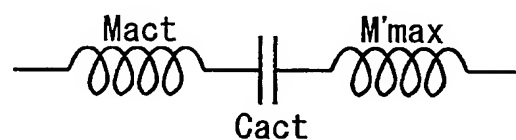


FIG. 21(D)

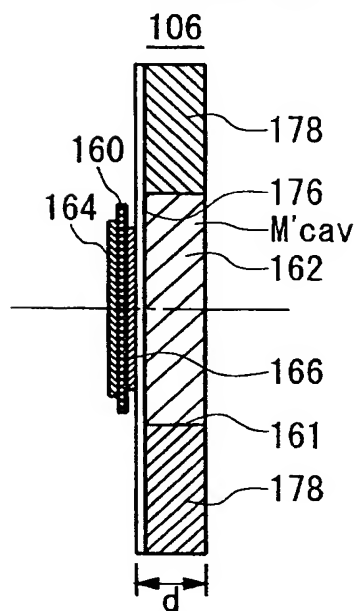


FIG. 21(E)

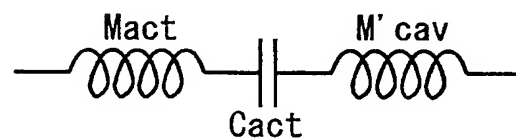


FIG. 21(F)

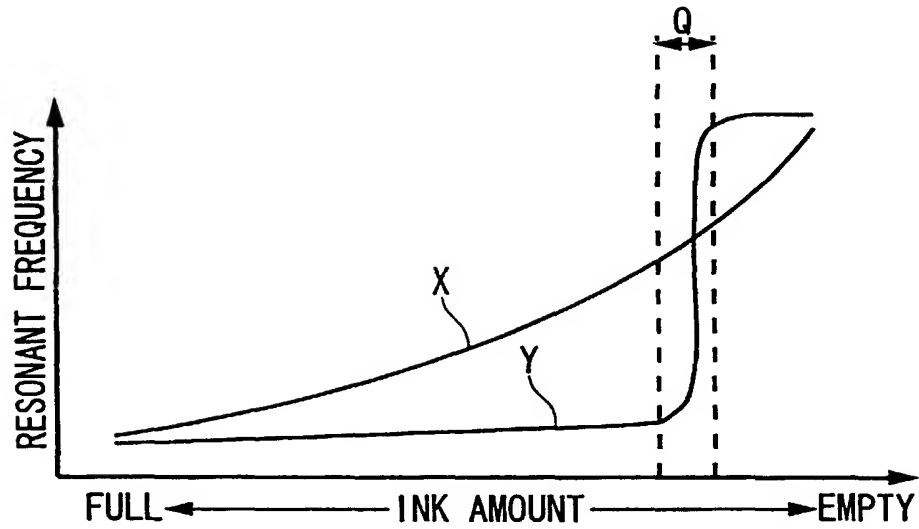


FIG. 22(A)

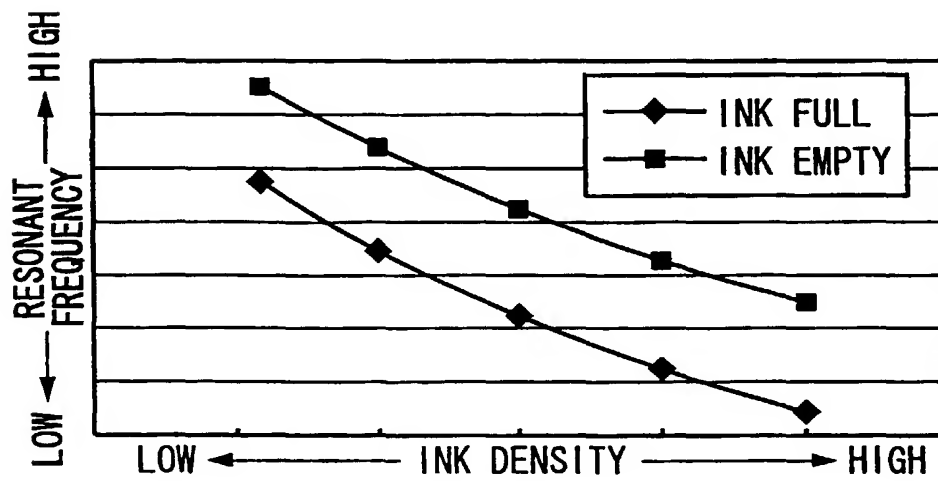
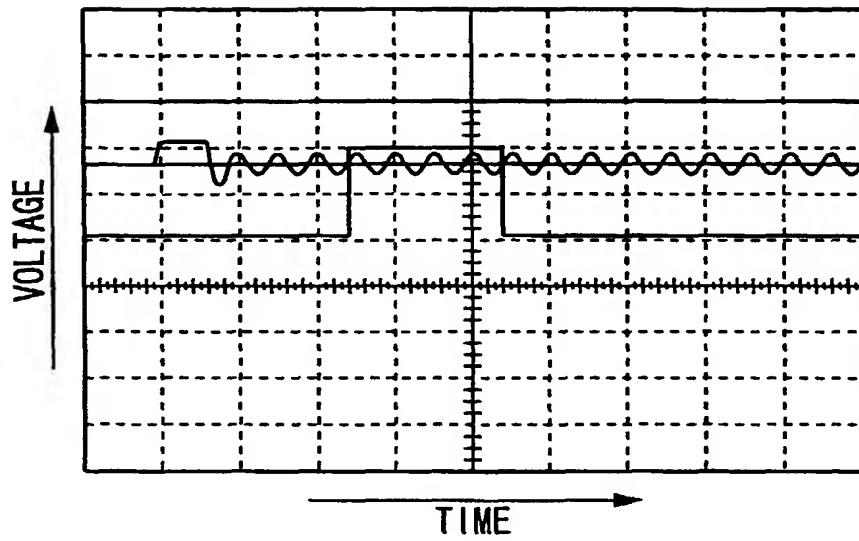
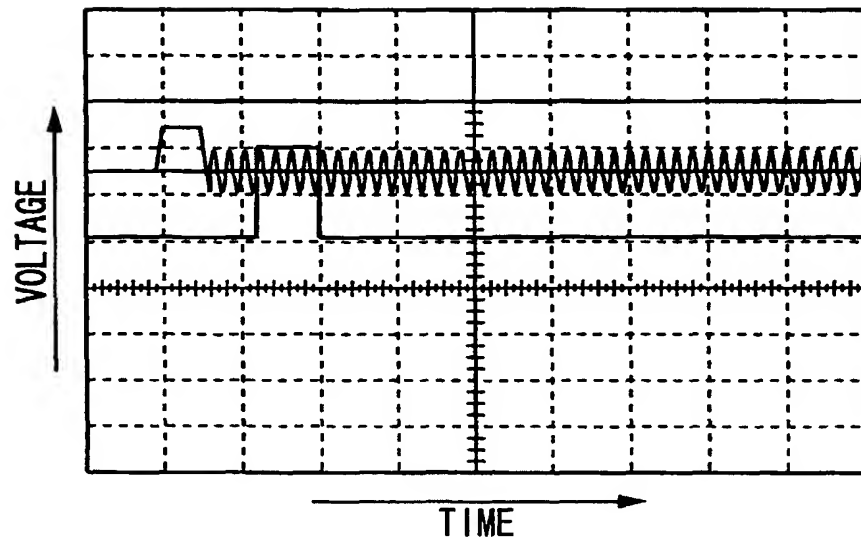


FIG. 22(B)



*FIG. 23(A)*



*FIG. 23(B)*

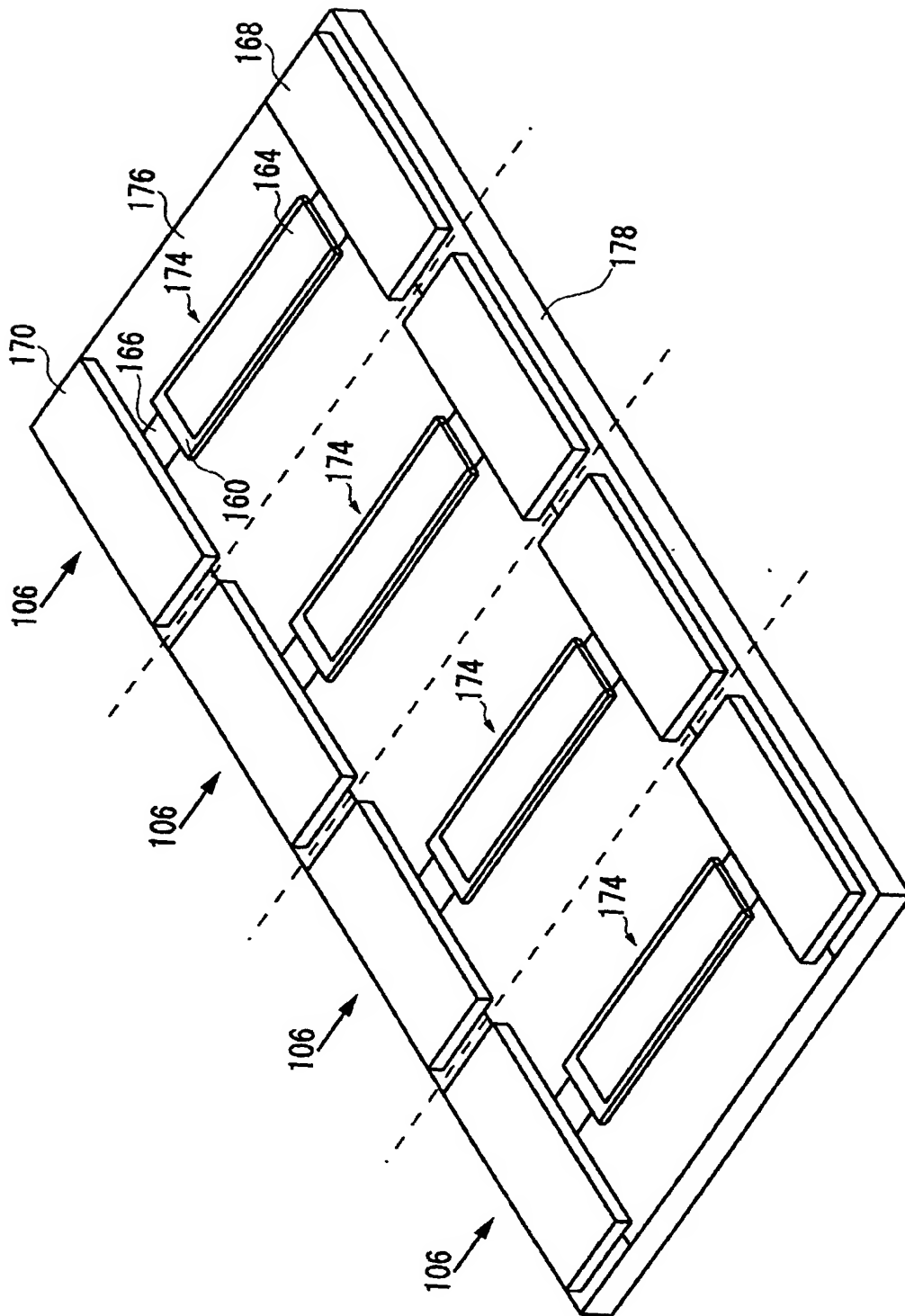


FIG. 24

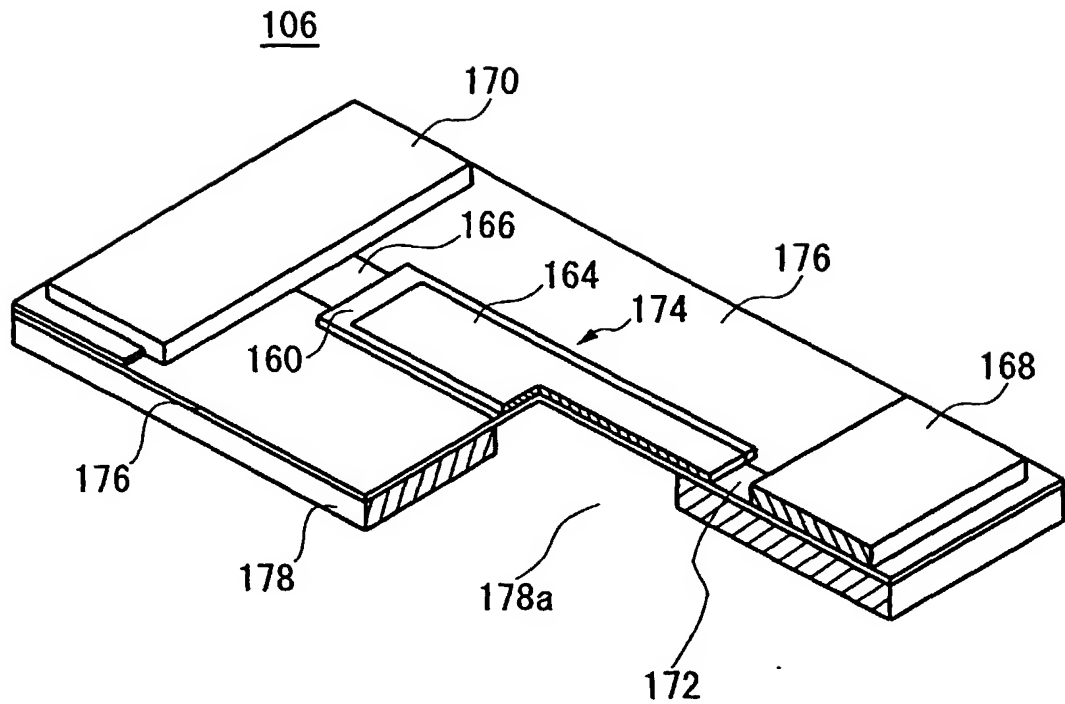


FIG. 25

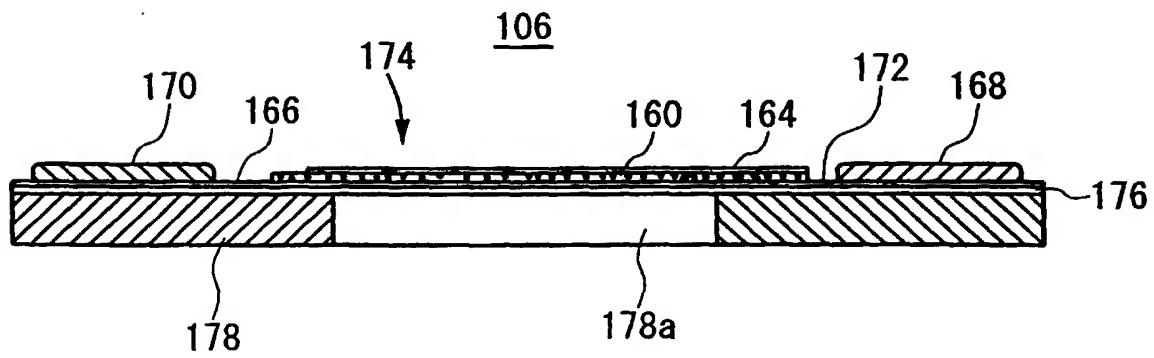
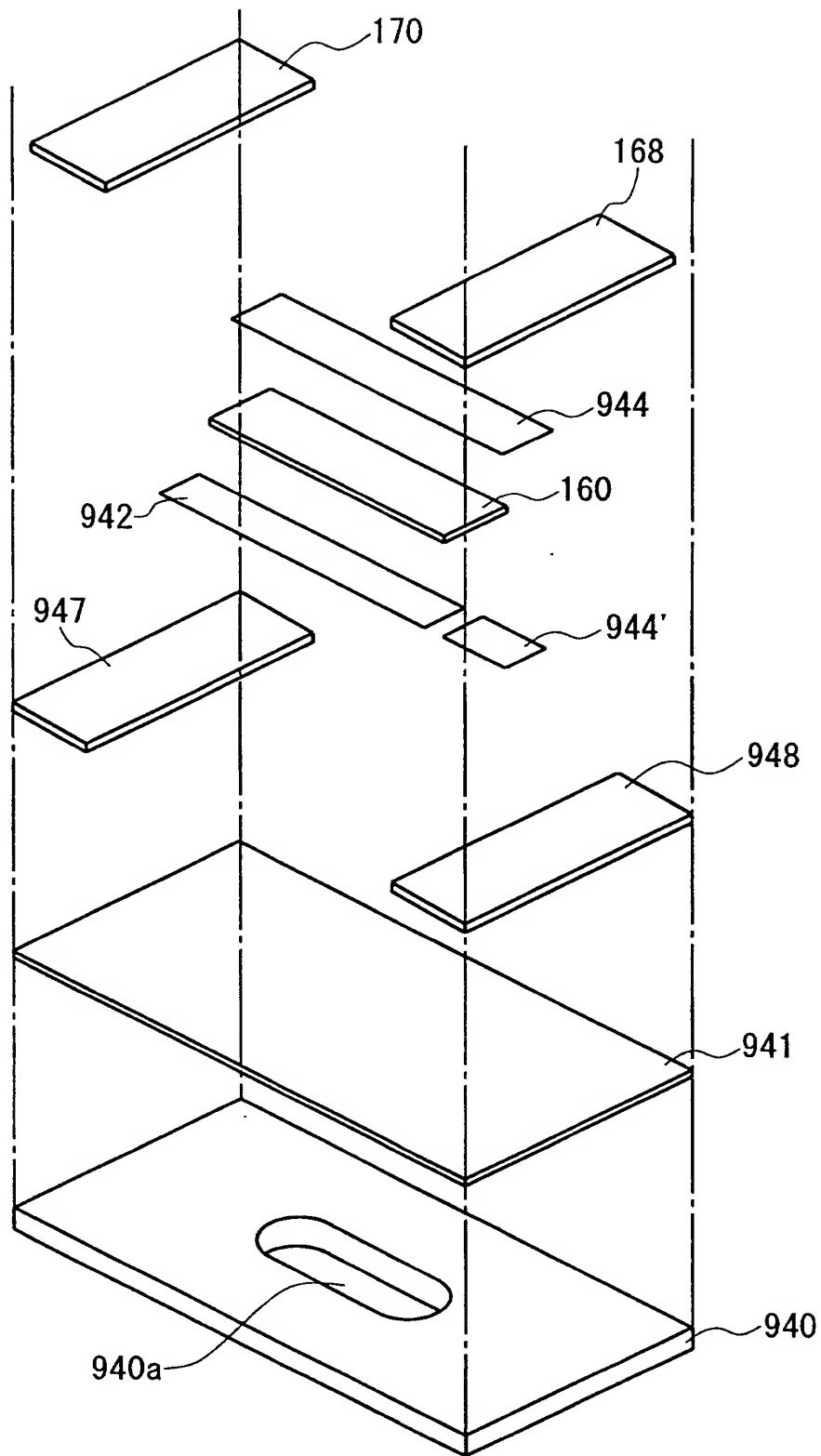


FIG. 26

106



**FIG. 27**

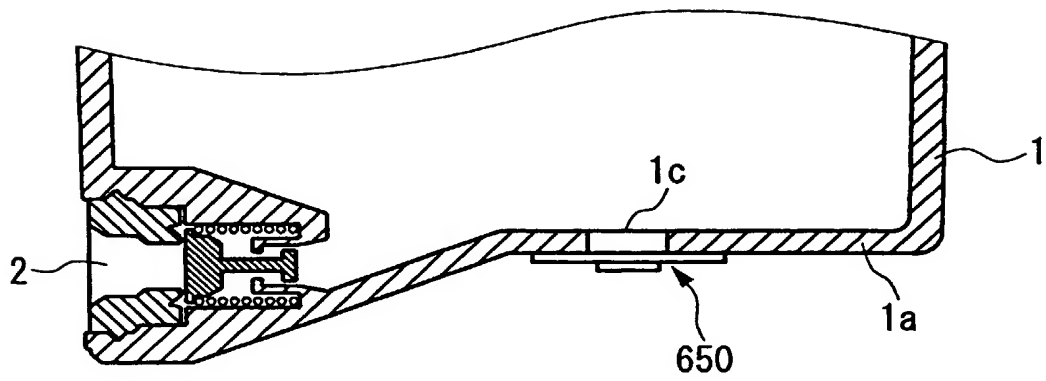


FIG. 28(A)

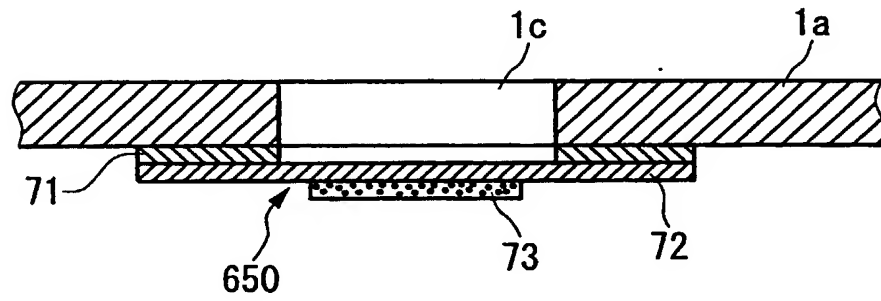


FIG. 28(B)

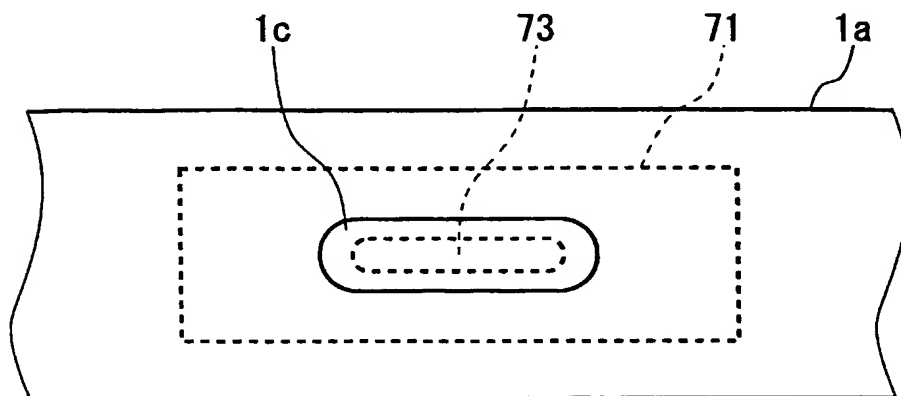


FIG. 28(C)

FIG. 29 (A)

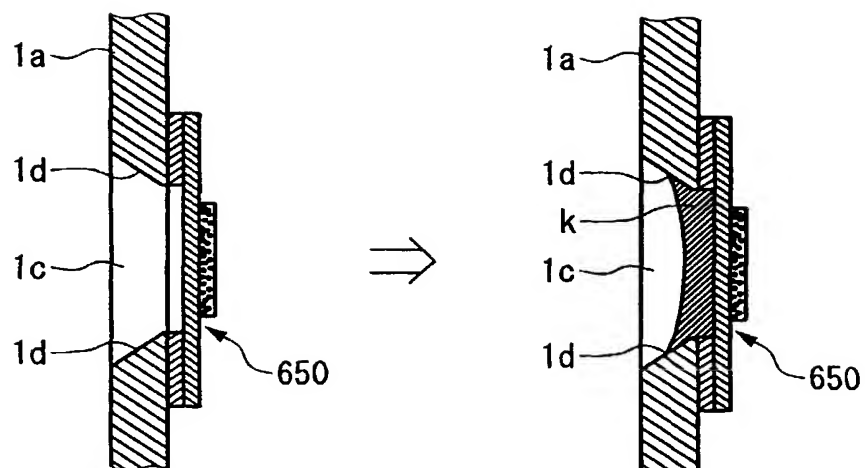


FIG. 29 (B)

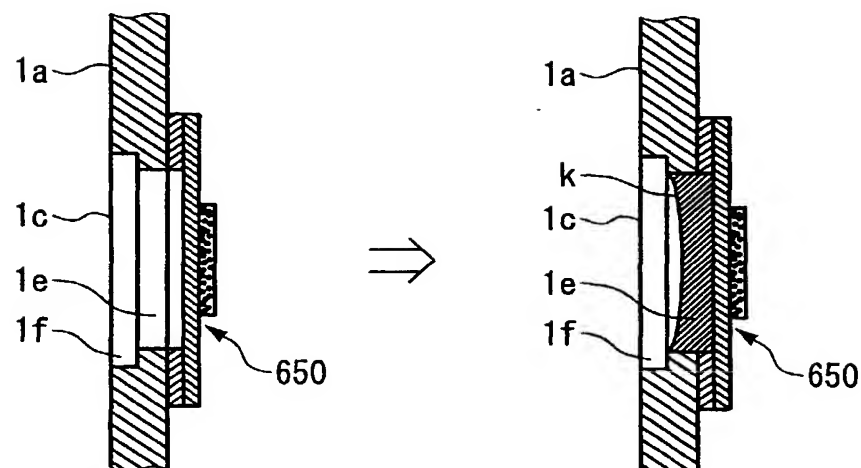
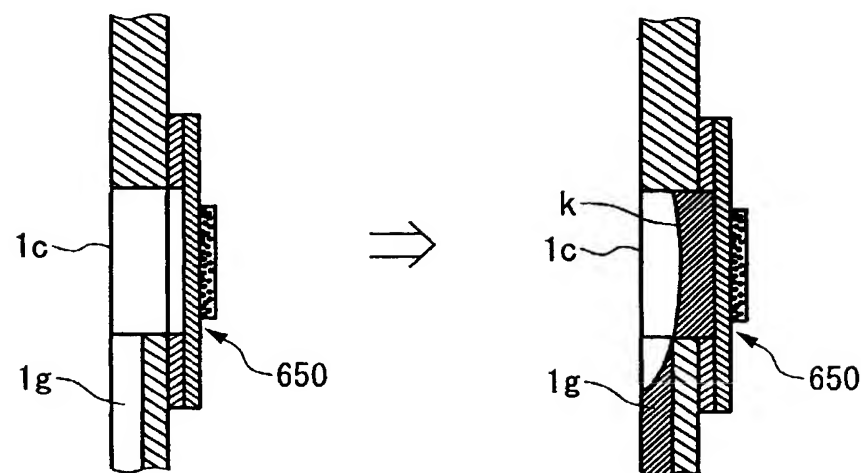
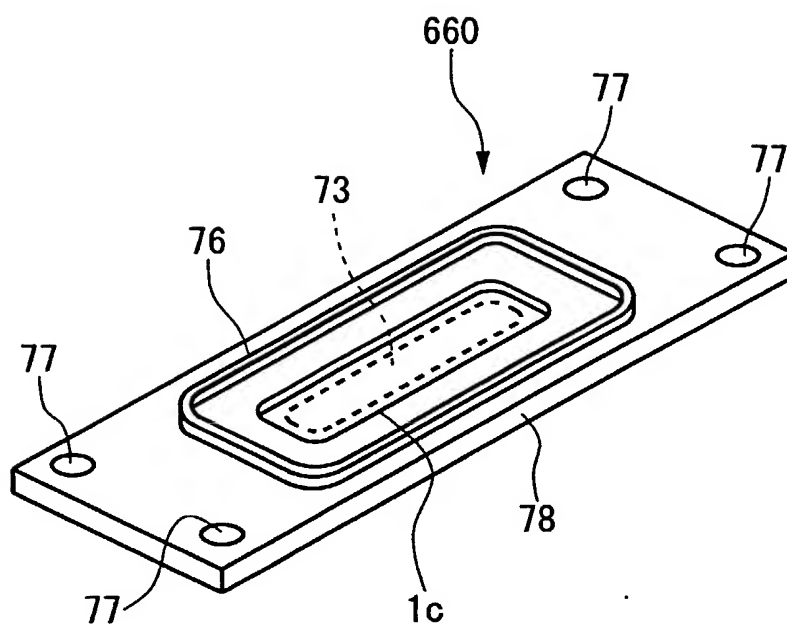


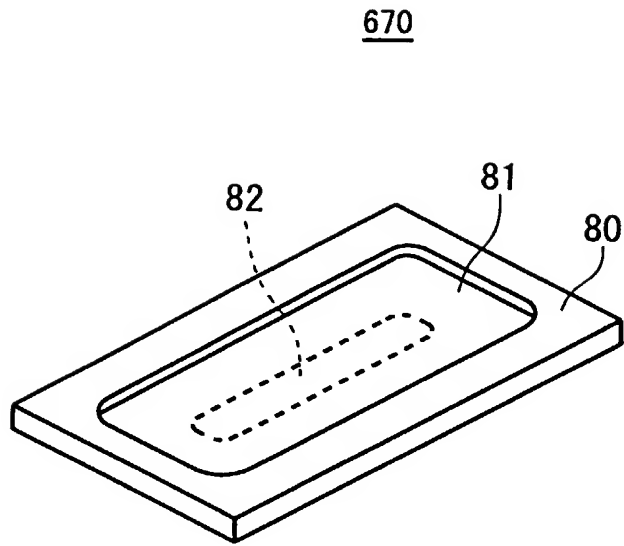
FIG. 29 (C)



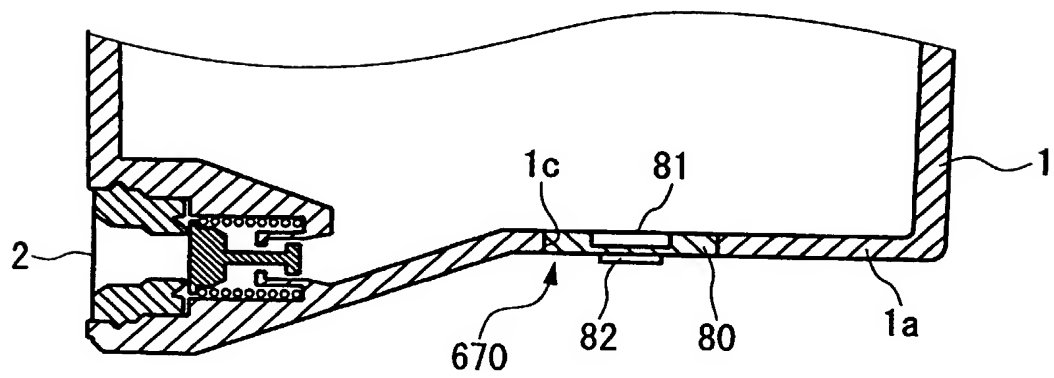




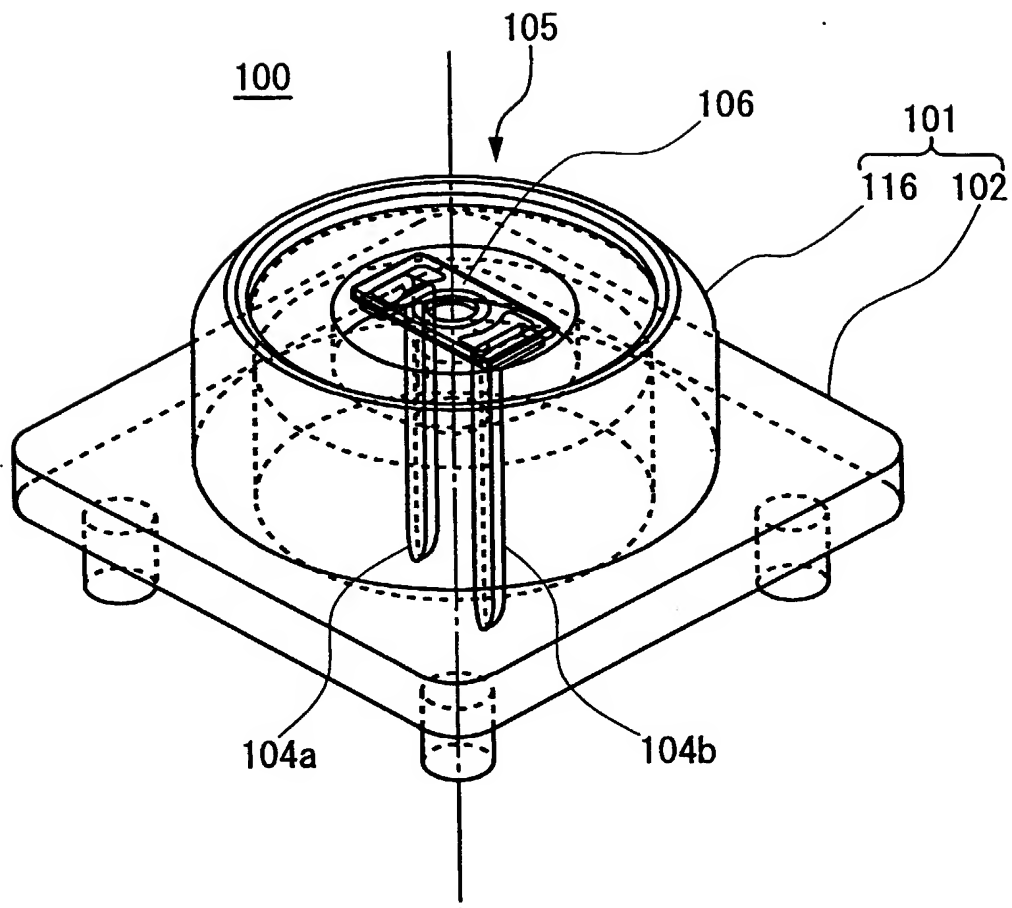
**FIG. 30**



*FIG. 31 (A)*



*FIG. 31 (B)*



**FIG. 32**

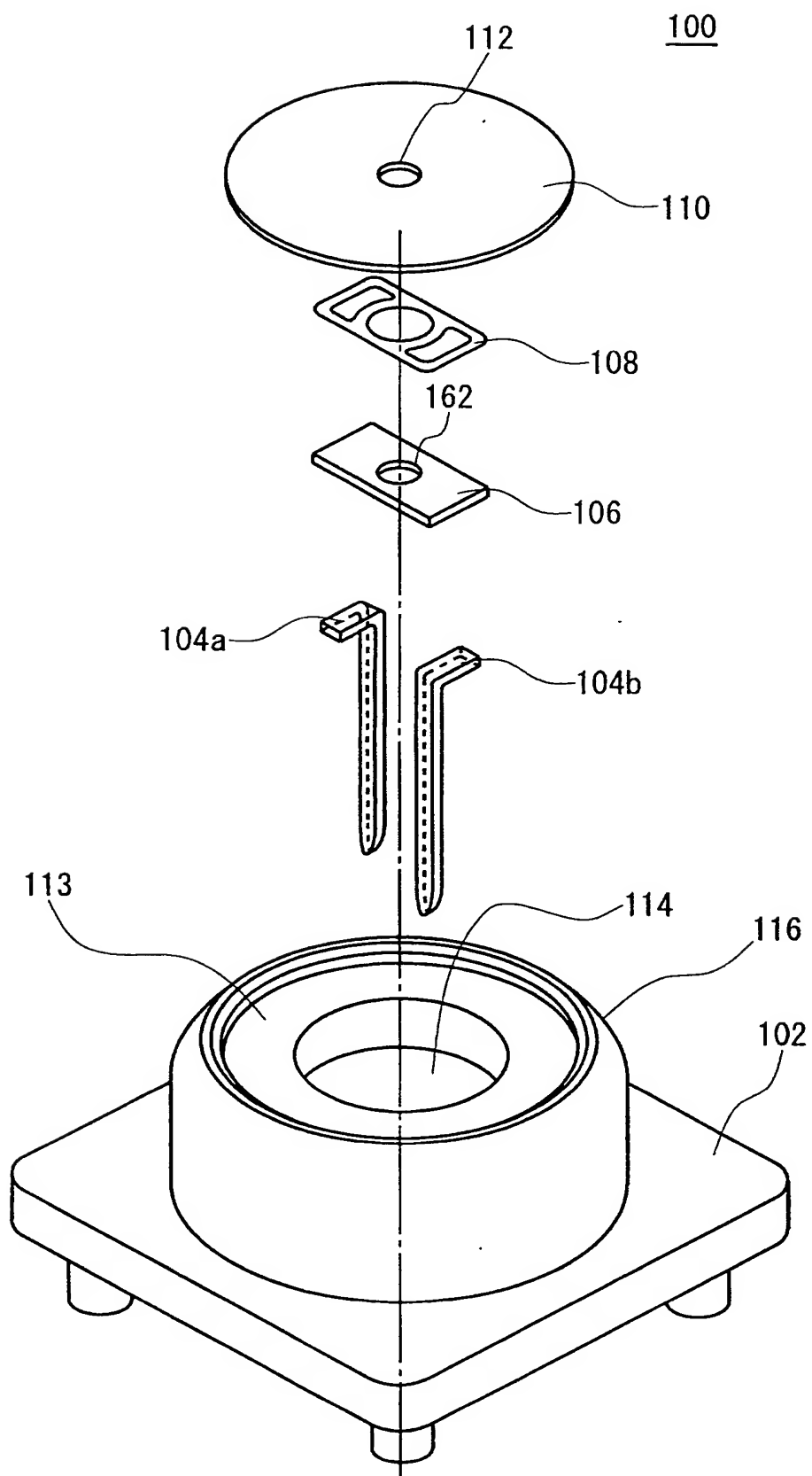
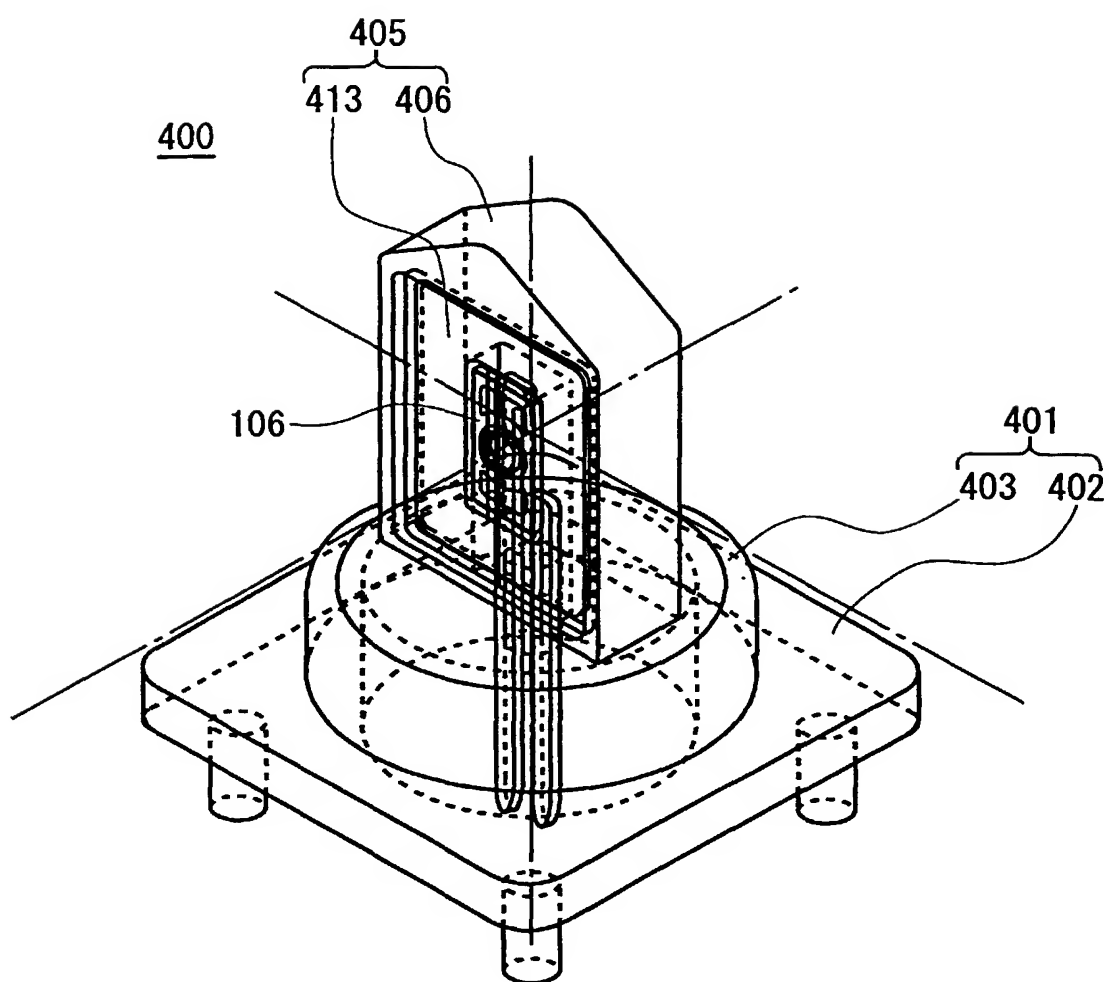
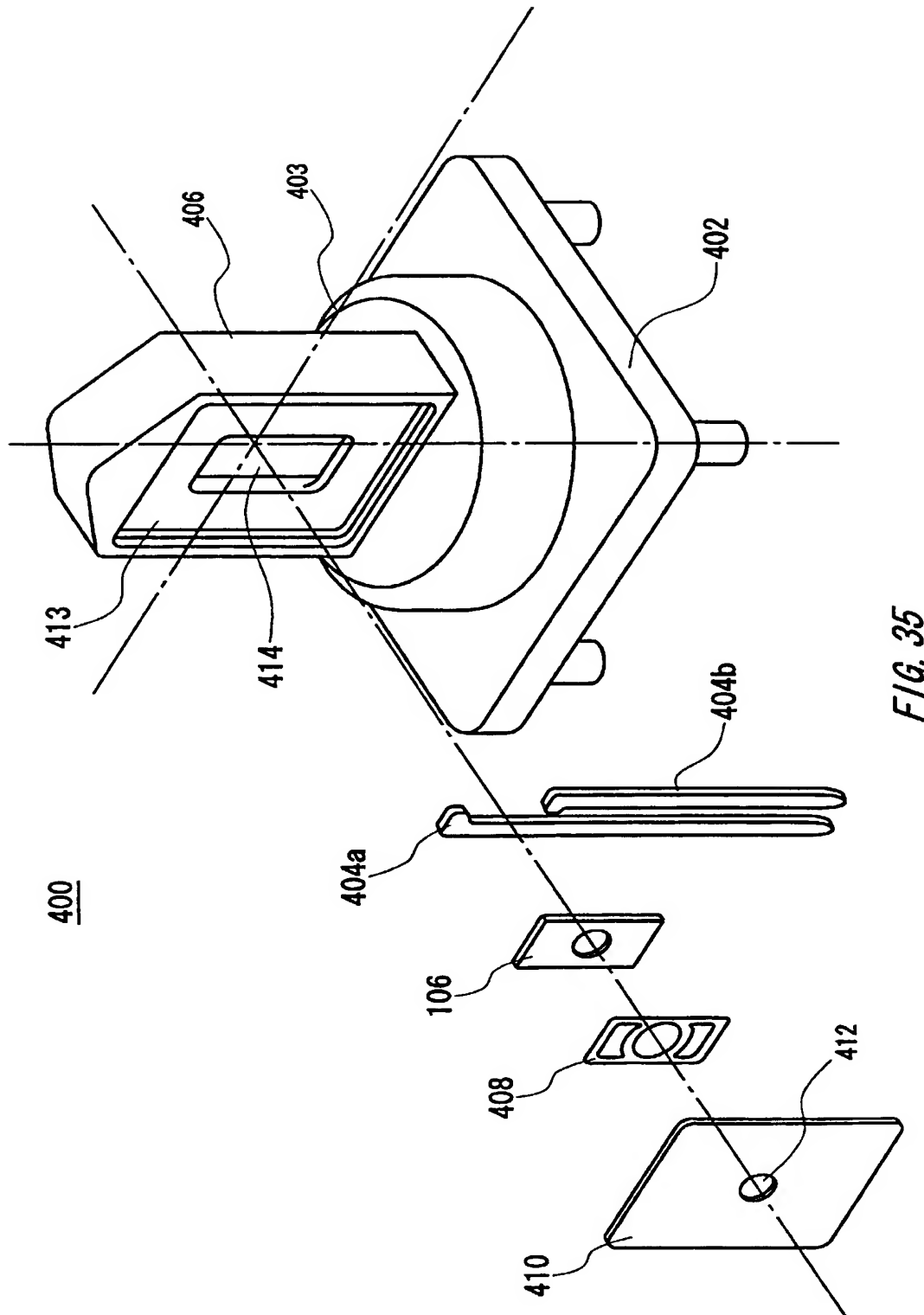
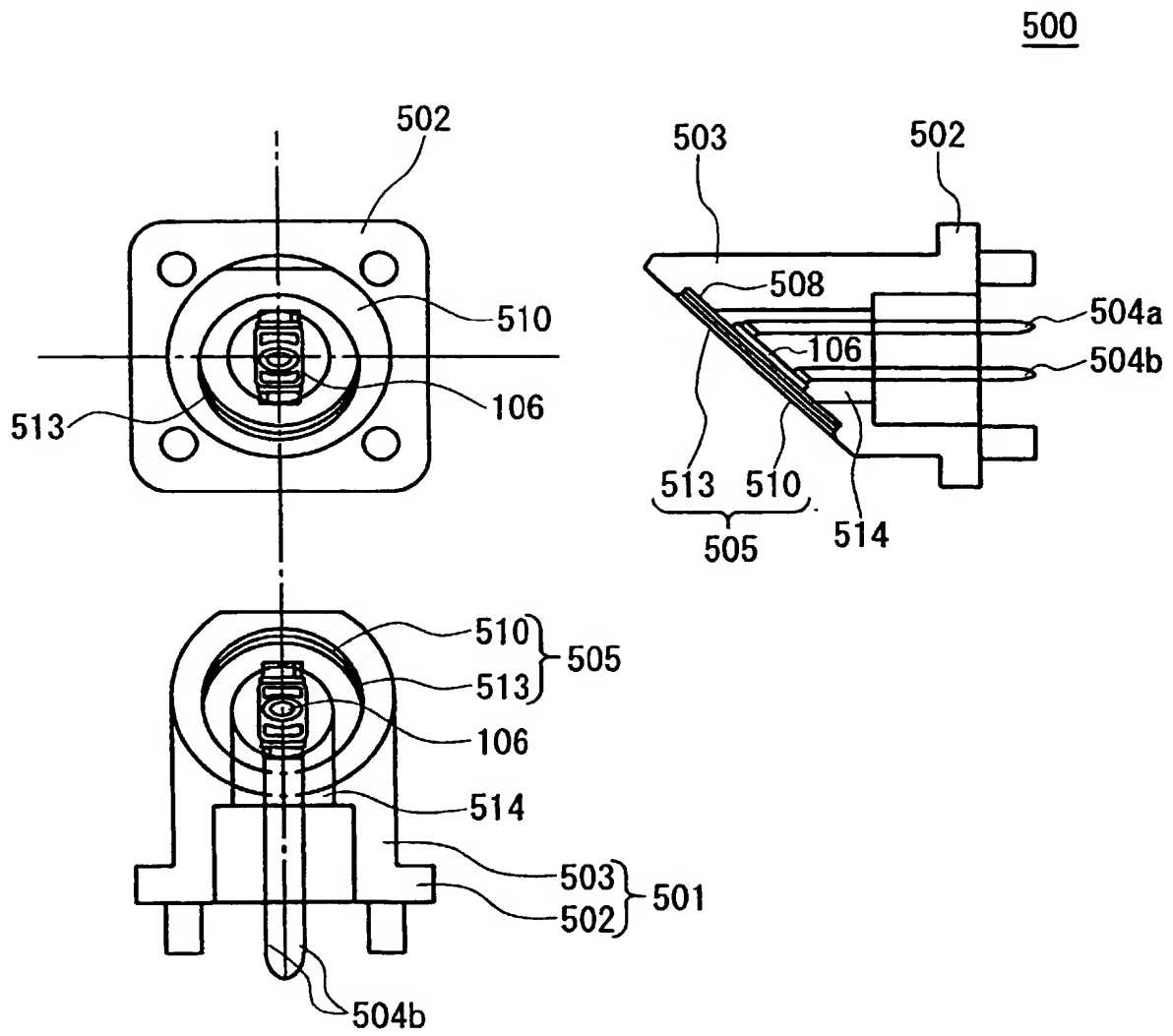


FIG. 33

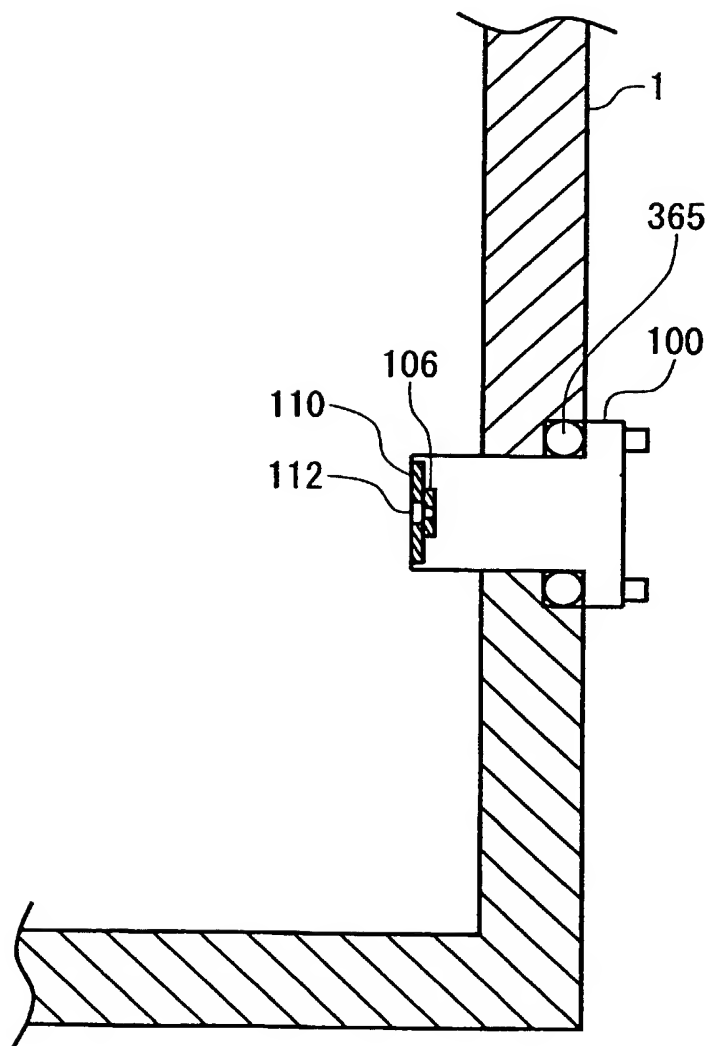


**FIG. 34**



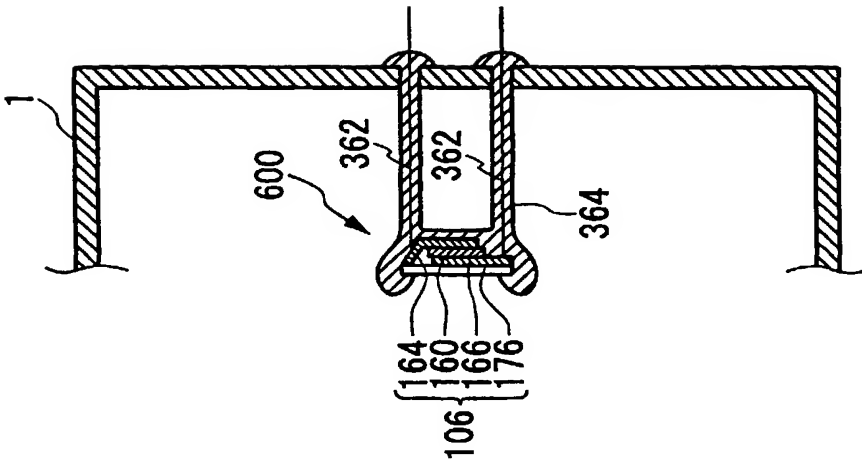
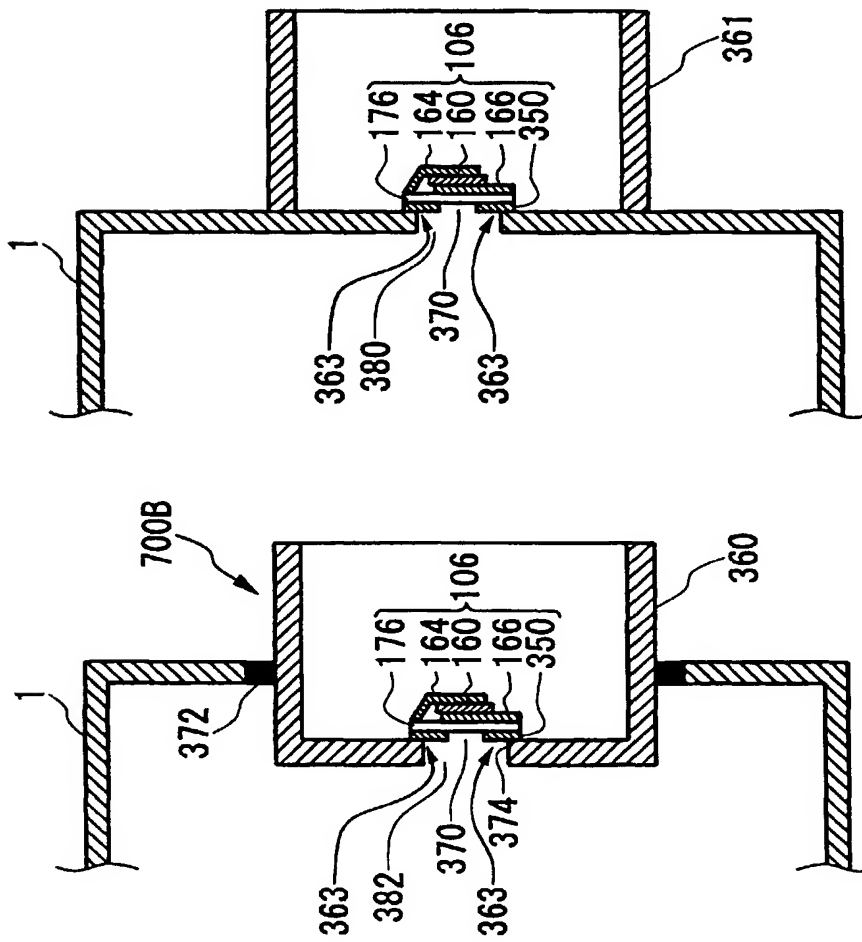
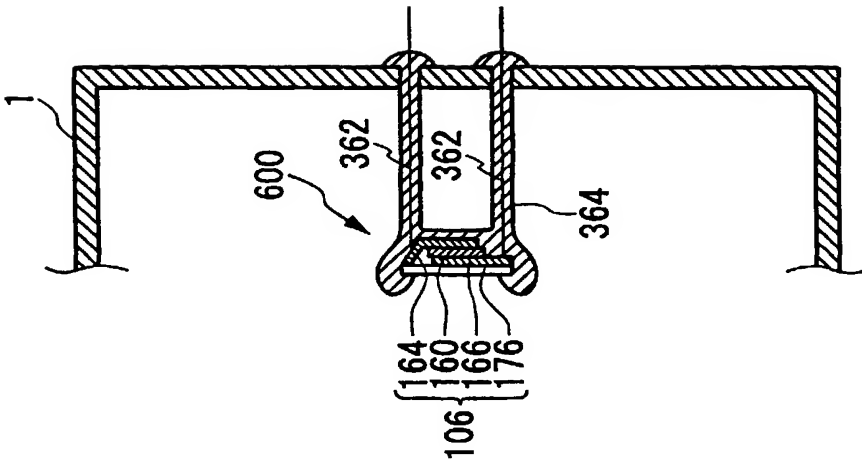


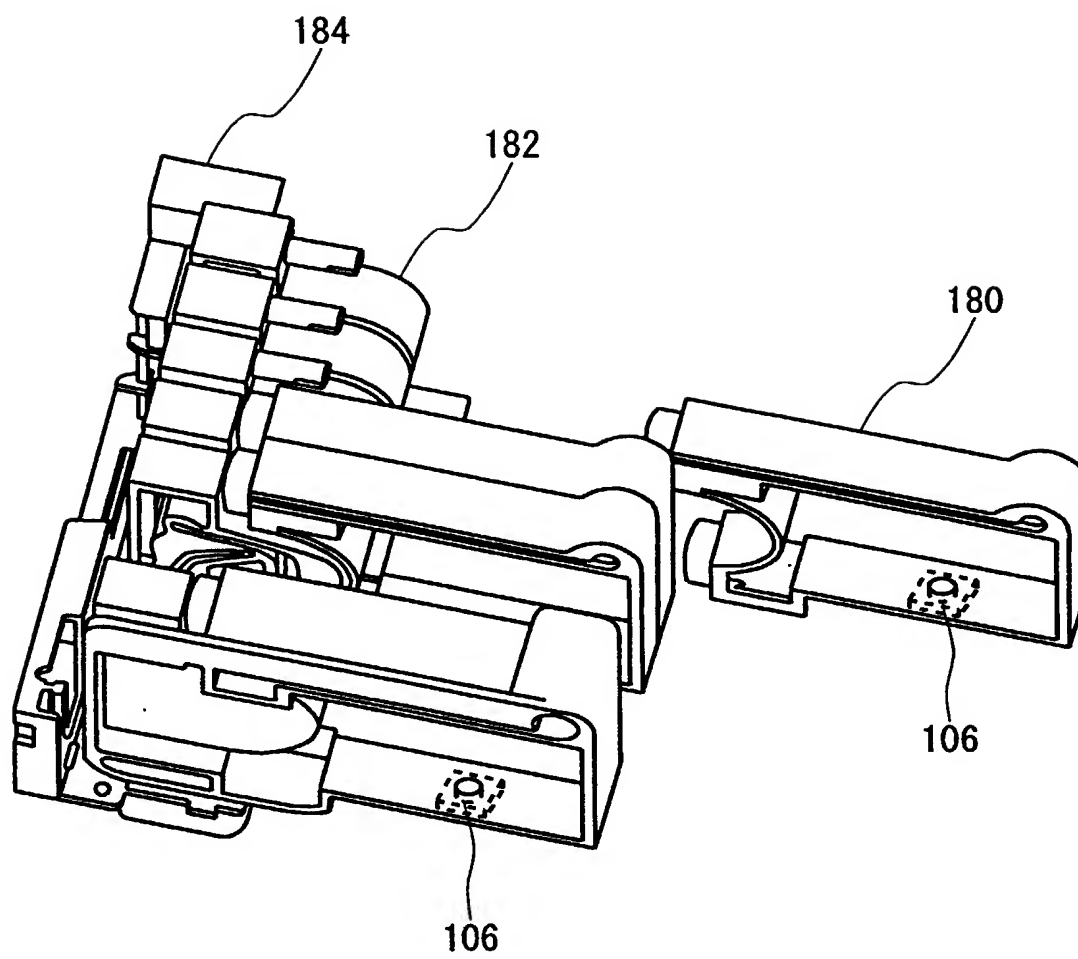
*FIG. 36*



*FIG. 37*







*FIG. 39*

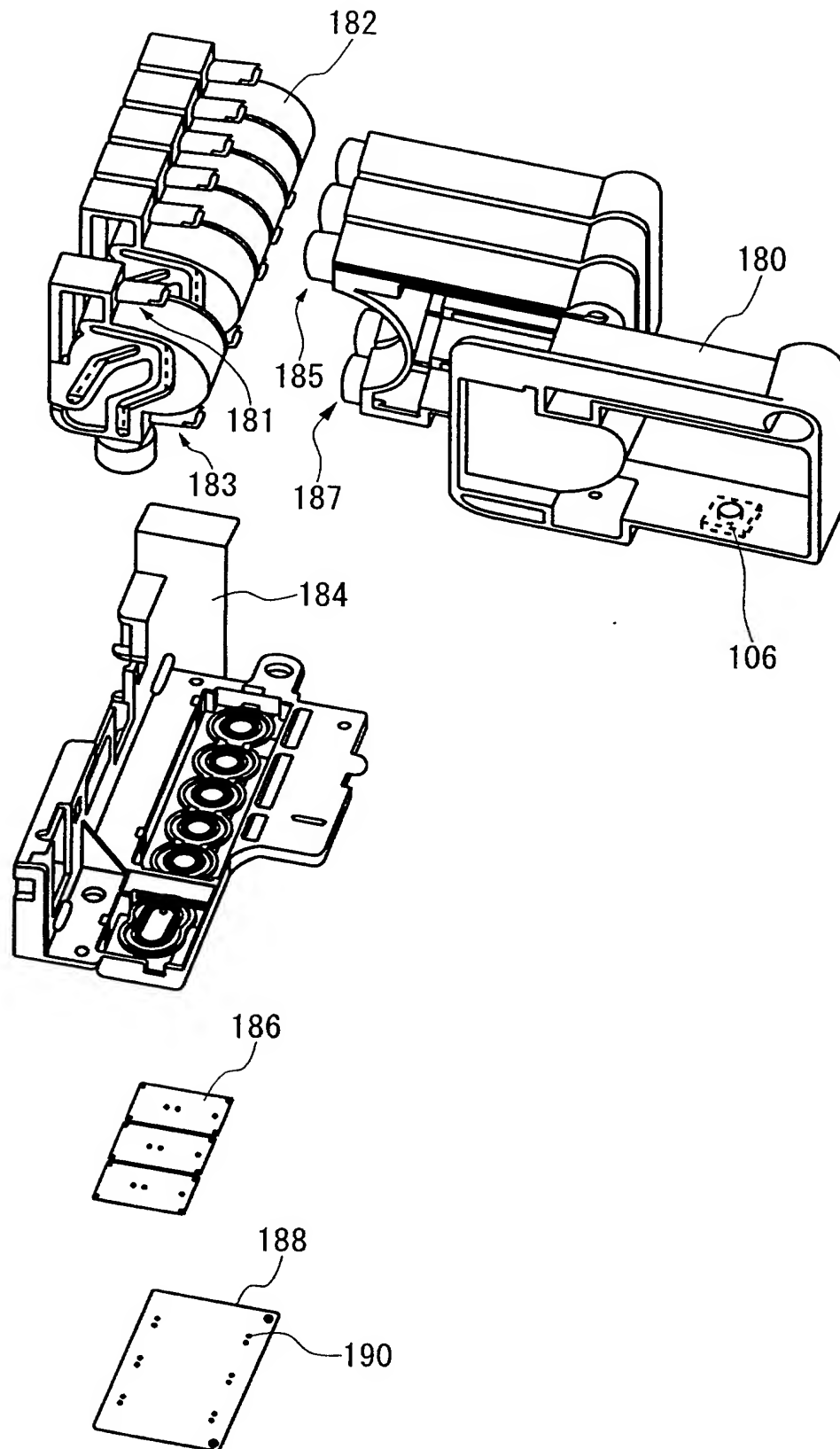
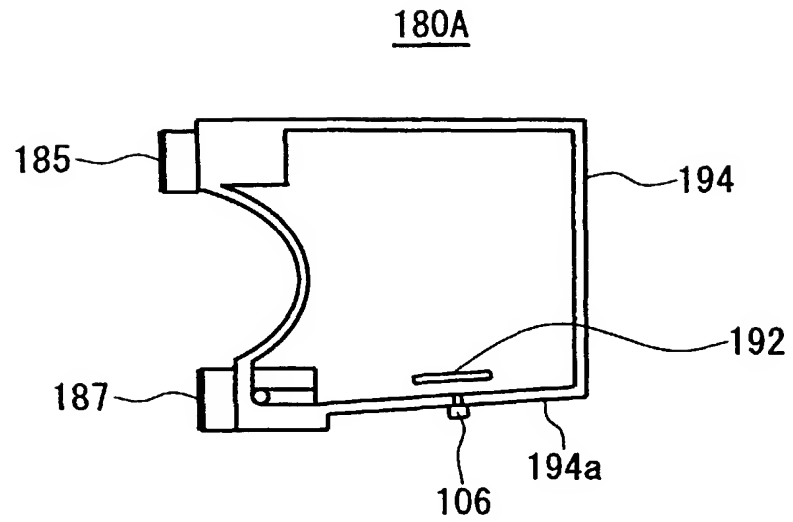
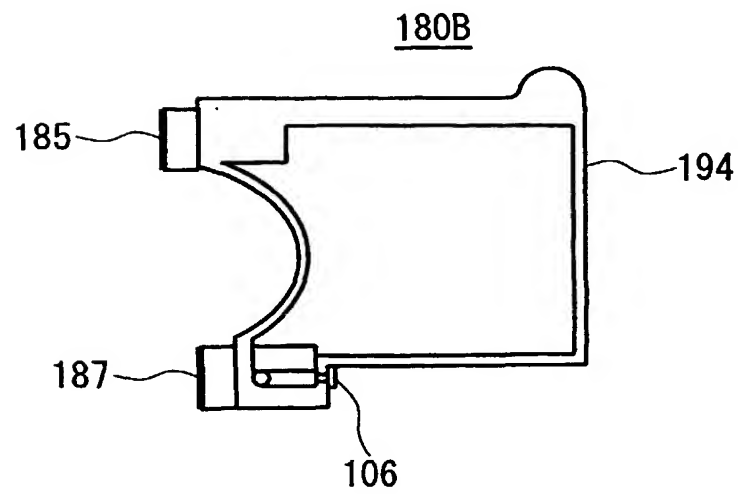


FIG. 40



*FIG. 41 (A)*



*FIG. 41 (B)*

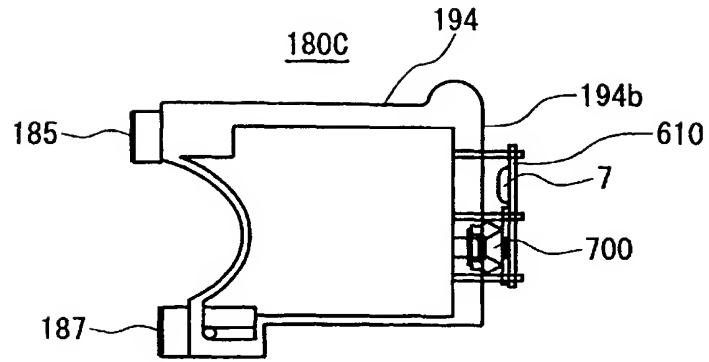


FIG. 42(A)

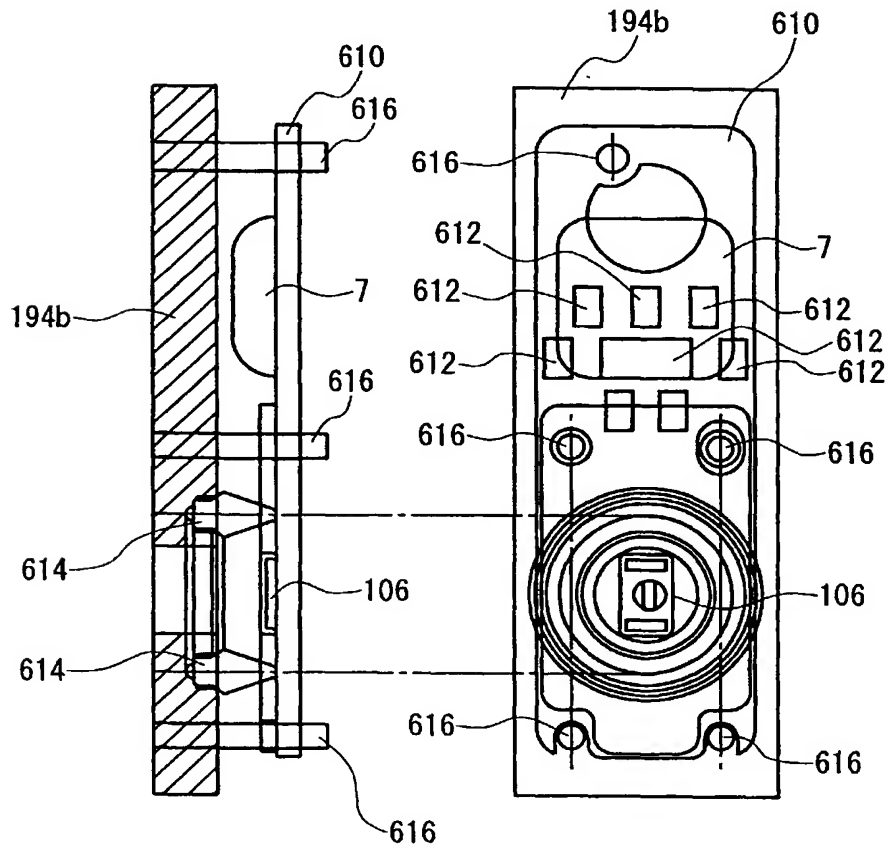
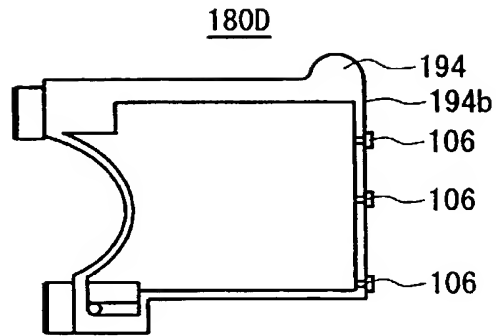
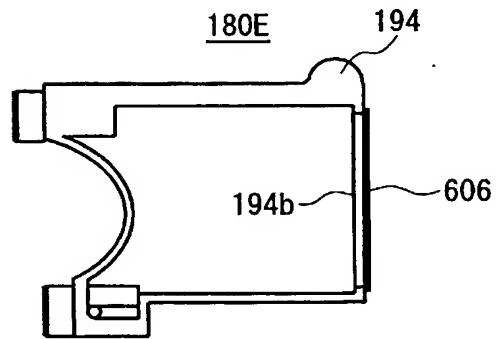


FIG. 42(B)

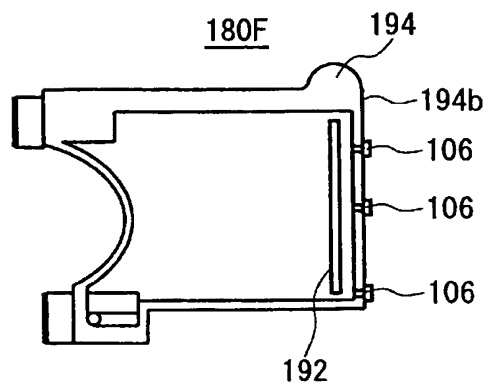
FIG. 42(C)



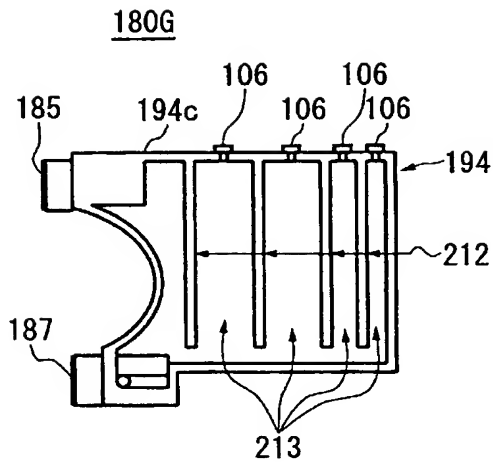
*FIG. 43(A)*



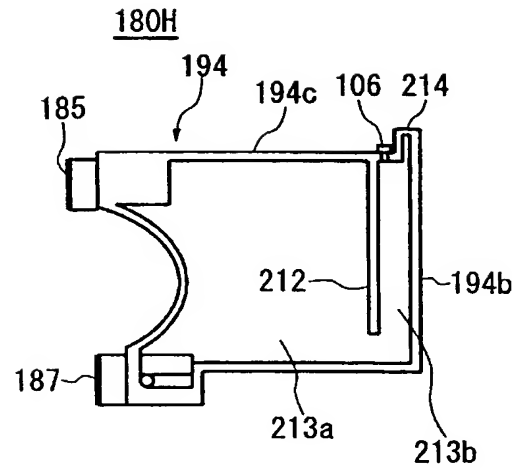
*FIG. 43(B)*



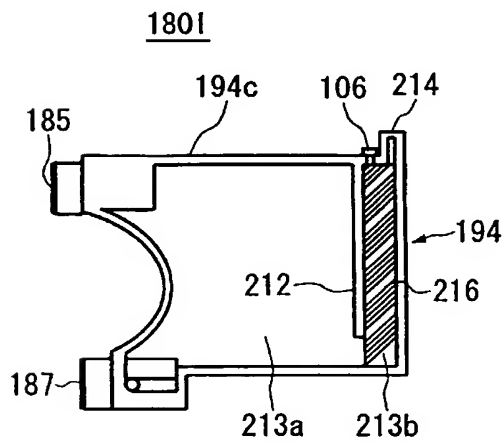
*FIG. 43(C)*



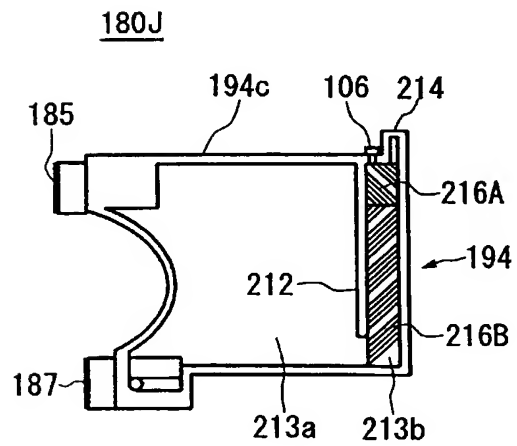
*FIG. 44 (A)*



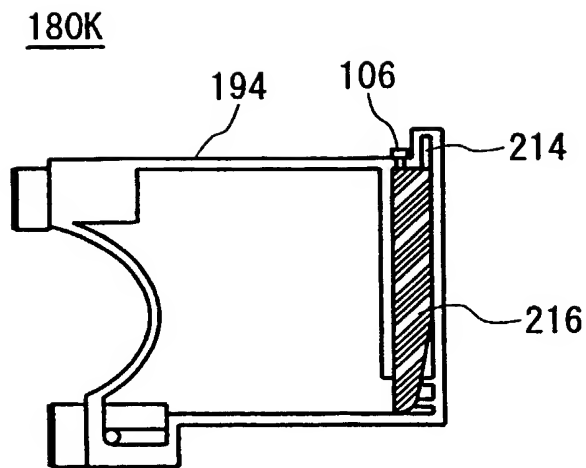
*FIG. 44 (B)*



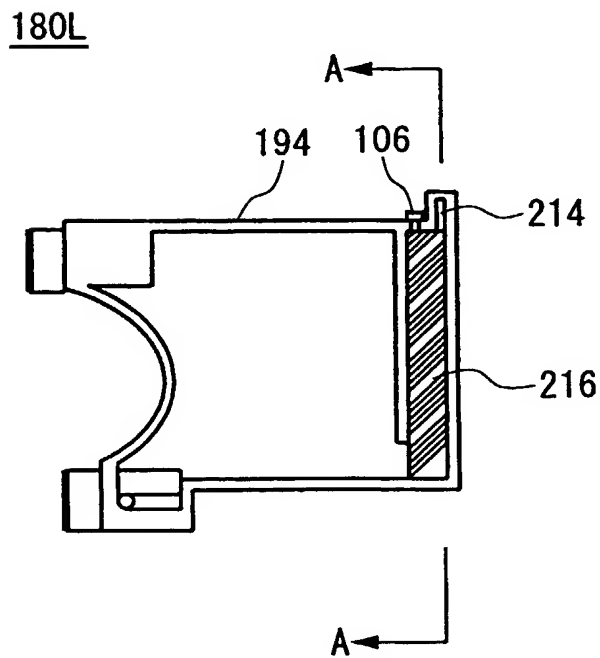
*FIG. 44 (C)*



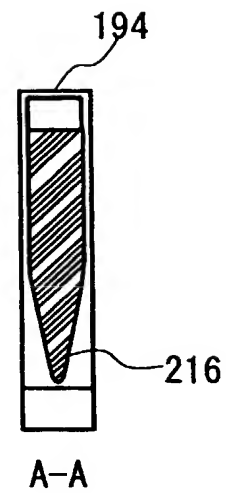
*FIG. 44 (D)*



*FIG. 45(A)*

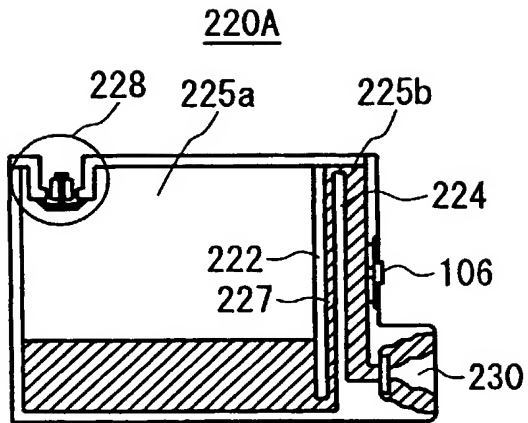


*FIG. 45(B)*

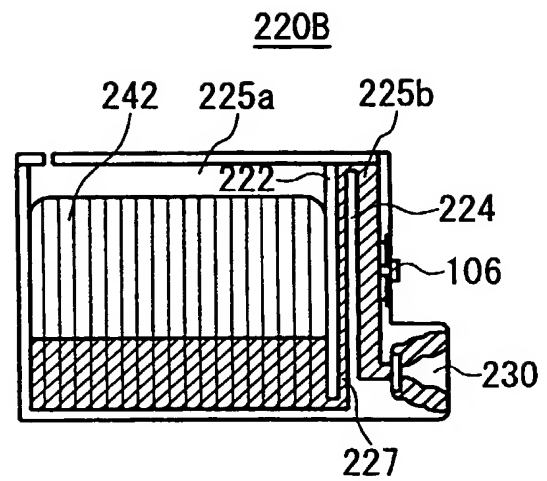


*FIG. 45(C)*

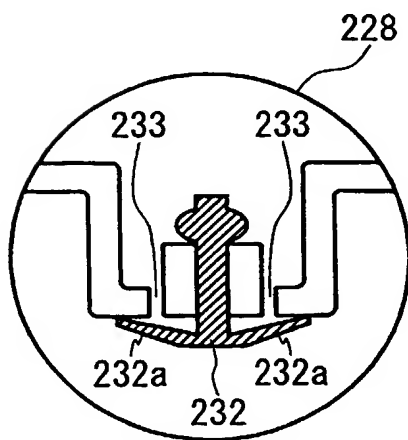




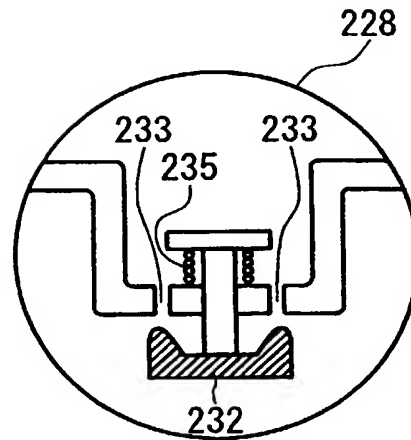
*FIG. 46(A)*



*FIG. 46(B)*



*FIG. 46(C)*



*FIG. 46(D)*

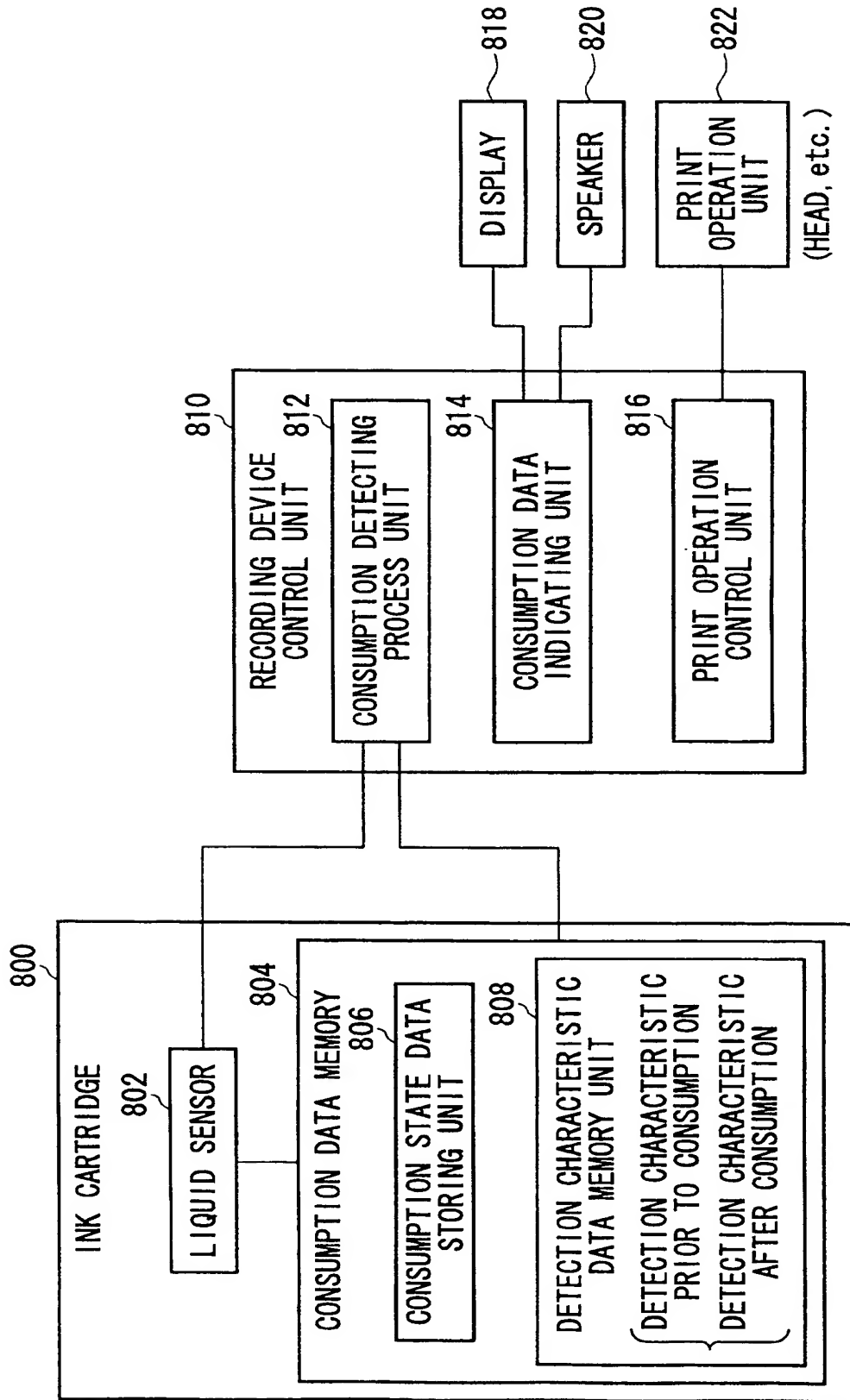


FIG. 47

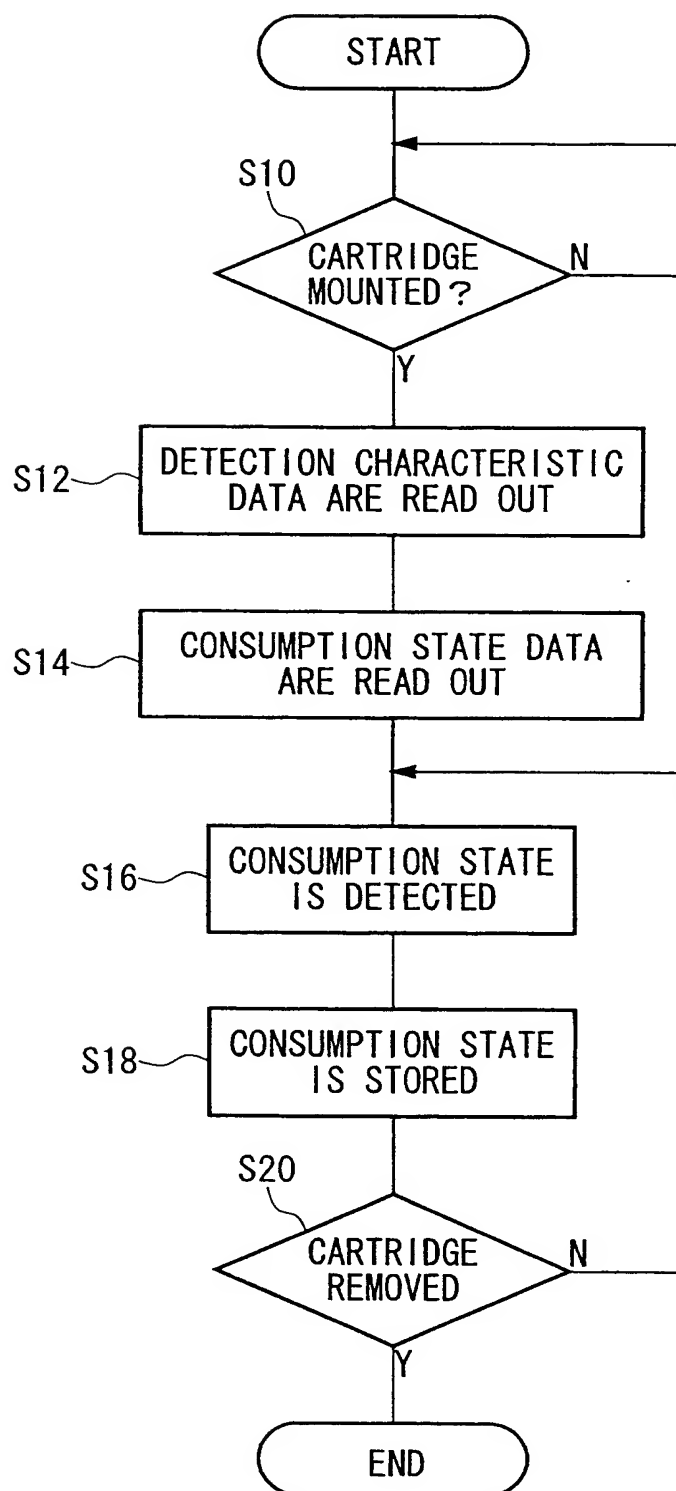
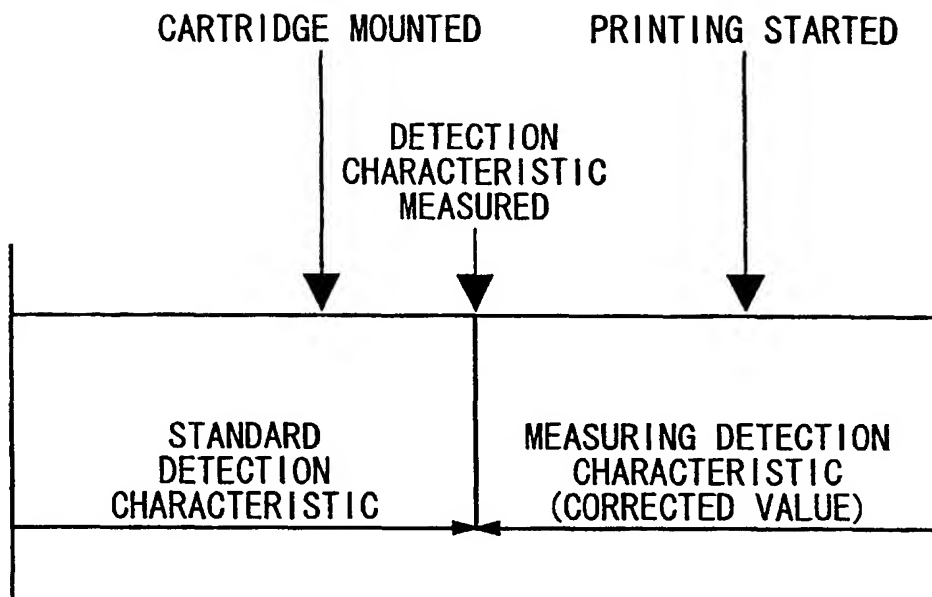
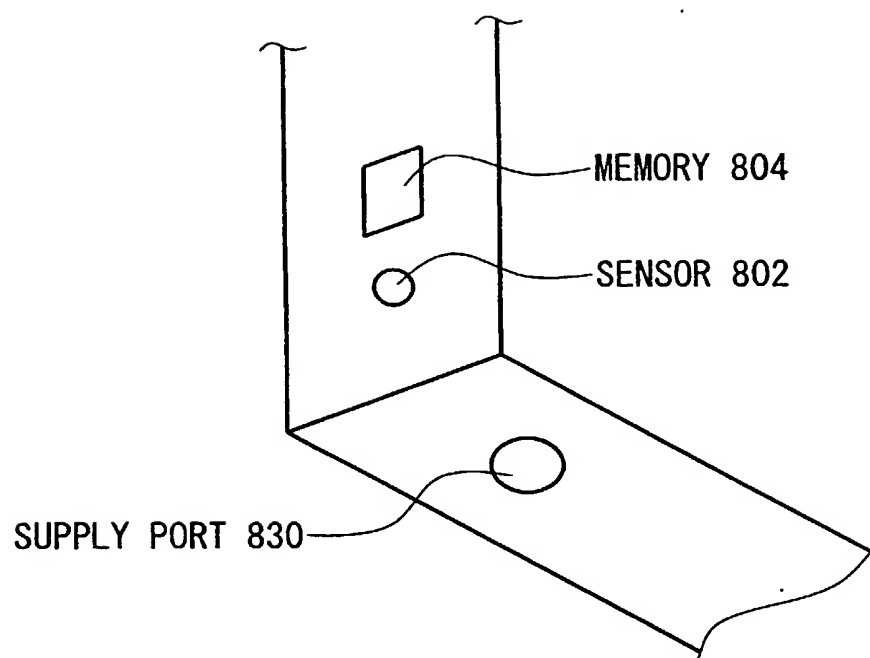


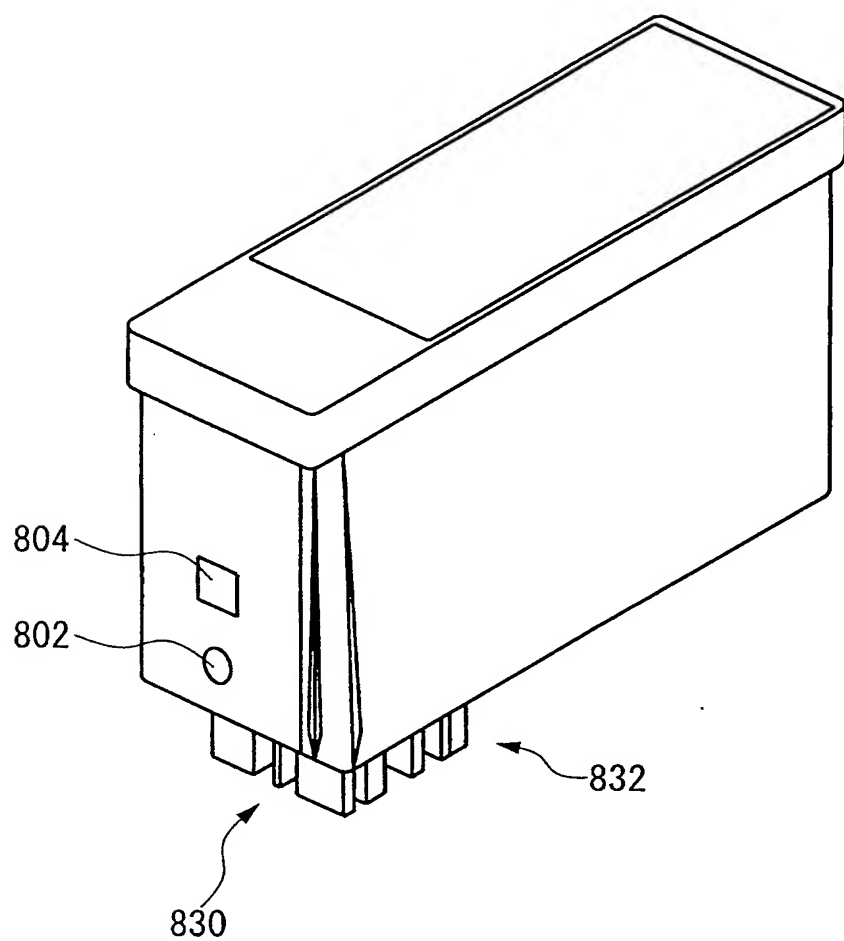
FIG. 48



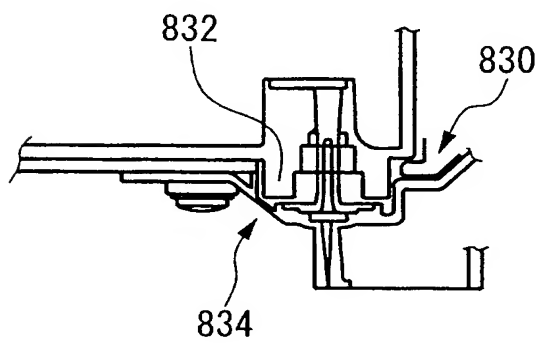
*FIG. 49*



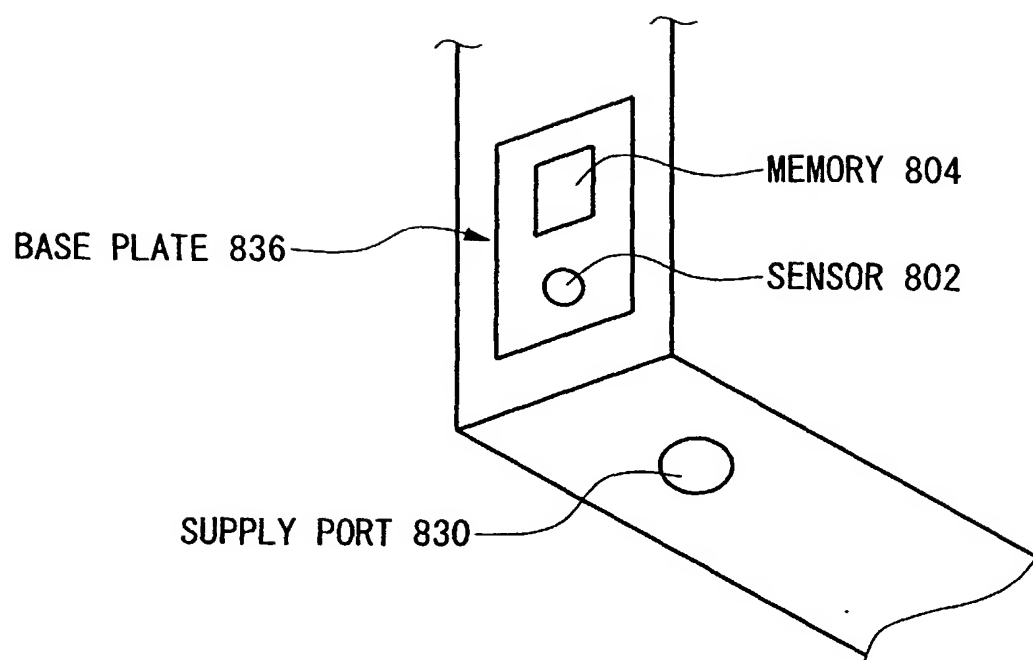
*FIG. 50*



*FIG. 51 (A)*



*FIG. 51 (B)*



*FIG. 52*

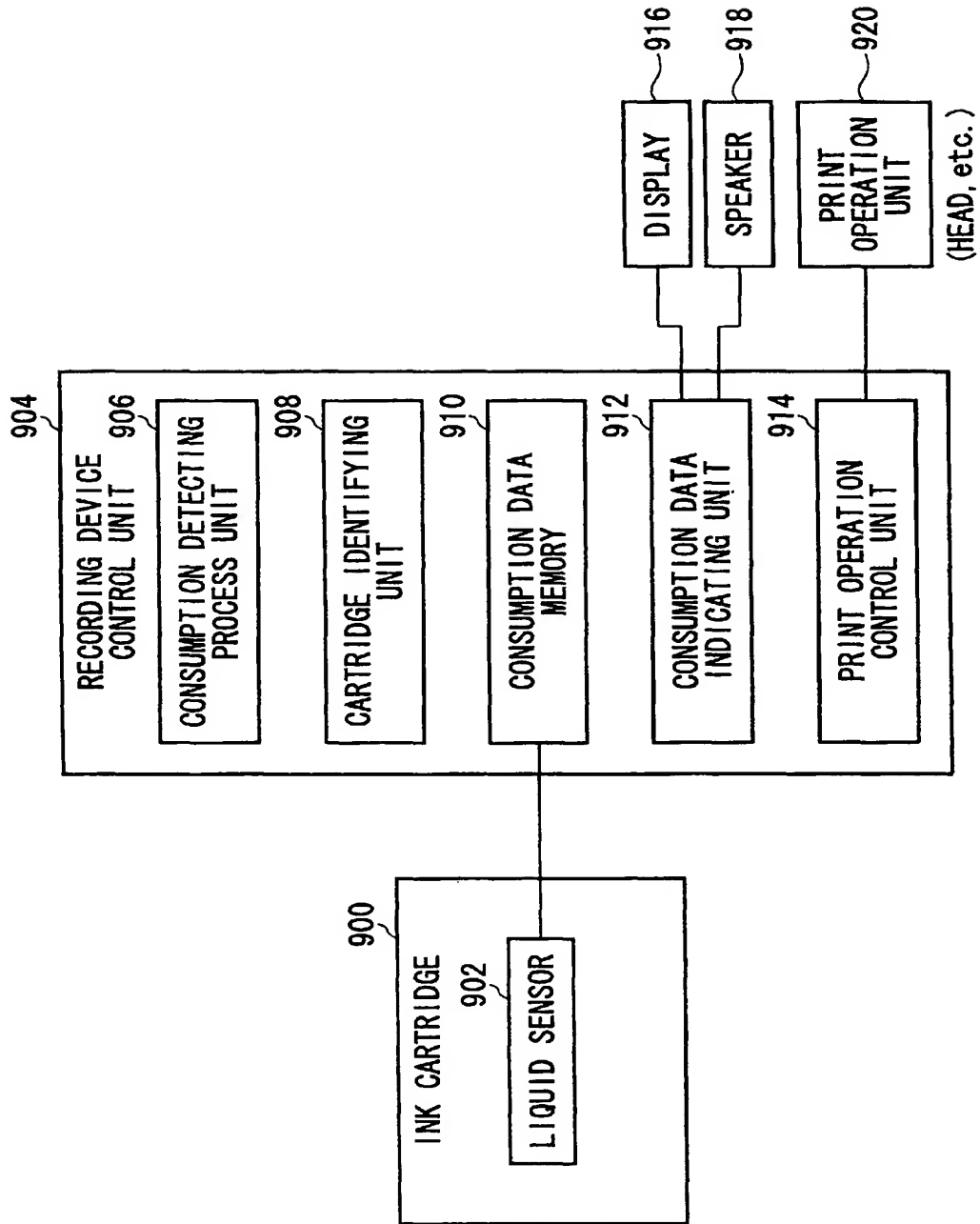


FIG. 53





Europäisches Patentamt  
European Patent Office  
Office européen des brevets



(11) **EP 1 053 880 A3**

(12) **EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION**

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**06.12.2000 Bulletin 2000/49**

(51) Int. Cl.<sup>7</sup>: **B41J 2/175, G01F 23/296**

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(22) Date of filing: **19.05.2000**

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MC NL PT SE**  
Designated Extension States:  
**AL LT LV MK RO SI**

(30) Priority: **20.05.1999 JP 13968399  
27.05.1999 JP 14753899  
10.09.1999 JP 25652299**

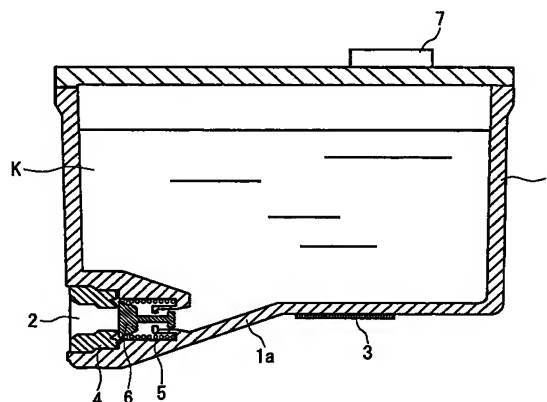
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**Suwa-shi, Nagano-ken, Japan (JP)**  
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**Suwa-shi, Nagano-ken, Japan (JP)**

(74) Representative: **HOFFMANN - EITLE**  
**Patent- und Rechtsanwälte**  
**Arabellastrasse 4**  
**81925 München (DE)**

(54) **A liquid container having a liquid consumption detecting device therein**

(57) An ink cartridge serving as a liquid container, comprises a liquid sensor having a piezoelectric element which detects a consumption state of the liquid contained in the container, and a consumption data memory as a memory means. The consumption data memory is a rewritable memory which stores consumption related data which are related to the detection of the consumption state using the liquid sensor. The consumption related data are, for example, consumption state data as a result of the detection. Even when the ink cartridge is removed, the consumption state data can still be utilized. The consumption related data may be a detection characteristic detected depending on the consumption state of the liquid. Based on this detection characteristic, the consumption state is detected utilizing the liquid sensor. The consumption state can be detected irrespective of individual differences of the ink cartridges.



**FIG. 1**

**EP 1 053 880 A3**



**European Patent  
Office**

## EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number  
EP 00 11 0257

DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT			
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int.Cl.7)
X	WO 98 31548 A (HEWLETT PACKARD CO) 23 July 1998 (1998-07-23) * page 5, line 9 - page 6, line 25 * * page 7, line 28 - page 8, line 4 * * page 17, line 30 - page 20, line 29 * * figures 1,3,6 *	41-46	B41J2/175 G01F23/296
Y		1-9, 12-21, 25,26, 29-31, 34,35, 38-40, 47,50	
Y	US 5 586 085 A (LICHTE LEO J) 17 December 1996 (1996-12-17)  * column 8, line 16 - column 10, line 5 * * column 13, line 37 - column 14, line 11 * * column 16, line 38 - column 17, line 4 * * column 22, line 62 - column 23, line 51 * * figures 1,4A-5 *	1-9, 12-21, 25,26, 29-31, 34,35, 38-40, 47,50	TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int.Cl.7)  G01F B41J
X	EP 0 873 873 A (HEWLETT PACKARD CO) 28 October 1998 (1998-10-28) * column 5, line 37 - column 6, line 27 * * claims 1-3; figures 1-6 *	41-46	
A		1,13,25, 31,34	
The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search <b>THE HAGUE</b>		Date of completion of the search <b>13 October 2000</b>	Examiner <b>Papastefanou, E</b>
CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS X : particularly relevant if taken alone Y : particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category A : technological background O : non-written disclosure P : intermediate document		T : theory or principle underlying the invention E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D : document cited in the application L : document cited for other reasons ..... & : member of the same patent family, corresponding document	



European Patent  
Office

# EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number  
EP 00 11 0257

DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT			
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int.Cl.7)
A	US 5 793 705 A (GAZIS DENOS CONSTANTINOS ET AL) 11 August 1998 (1998-08-11) * figure 1 * * column 4, line 36 - column 5, line 46 * * column 7, line 11 - line 63 * -----	1, 13, 25, 31, 34, 41	
			TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int.Cl.7)
The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search <b>THE HAGUE</b>		Date of completion of the search <b>13 October 2000</b>	Examiner <b>Papastefanou, E</b>
CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS X : particularly relevant if taken alone Y : particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category A : technological background O : non-written disclosure P : intermediate document		T : theory or principle underlying the invention E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D : document cited in the application L : document cited for other reasons ----- & : member of the same patent family, corresponding document	

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ON EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION NO.**

EP 00 11 0257

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13-10-2000

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For more details about this annex : see Official Journal of the European Patent Office, No. 12/82